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THE LETTERS OF MARGARET PASTON

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1971

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance a thesis entitled The Letters of Margaret Paston, submitted by Ruth A. Pearce in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Date September 30, 1971.

ABSTRACT

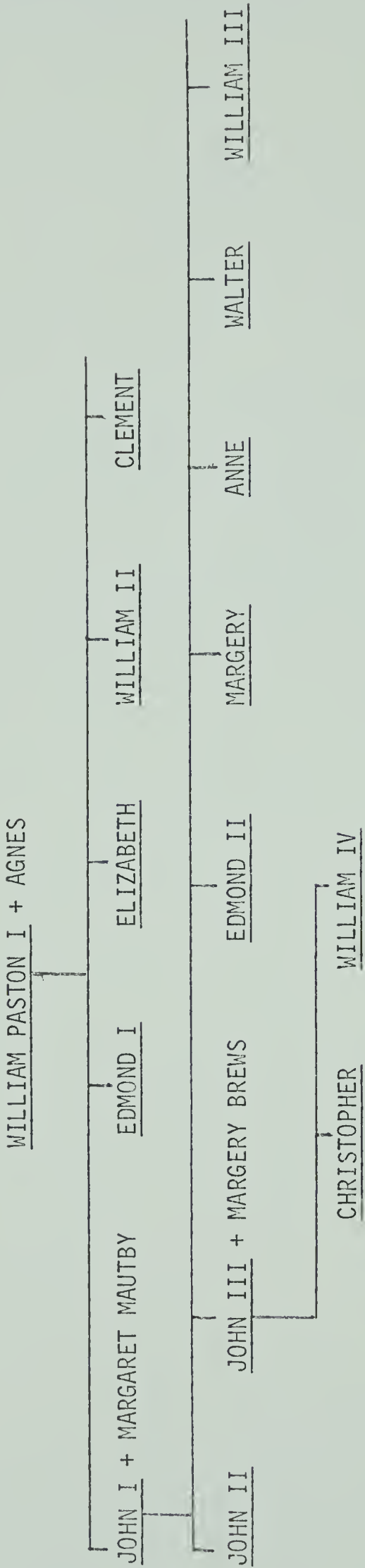
The aim of this thesis is to explore the letters of Margaret Paston and other letters relating to her in The Paston Letters in order to determine what can be learned about her art in letter writing, her language, her character, and her place in fifteenth-century Norfolk. Chapter one describes the Paston family into which she married and the members of the three generations with whom she was most intimately concerned. It also relates the events which to a large extent gave rise to Margaret's letters. The history of the discovery and of the editing of The Paston Letters is traced in Chapter two. The combination of the rise of English as the written language and the spread of education in the fifteenth century which enabled people from many levels of society to write letters is discussed and the surviving collections of private correspondence are noted. The Paston Letters are examined from a historical, social and, particularly, a linguistic point of view. Since the letters express the language of their writers in an unself-conscious manner, they provide evidence of the state of English in Norfolk at the close of the Middle Ages. Chapter three is concerned with the character of Margaret Paston as it is seen in her own letters and in other letters in the collection. They provide a comprehensive picture of an extremely able woman who was required to protect the family interests during her husband's absences, a picture

of her shrewdness and her business ability, of her attitude towards her husband and children, of her leisure and her faith. In Chapter four, Margaret Paston's letters are examined with the aim of discovering what they contain of linguistic and stylistic interest, particularly in regard to the period of her life, the subject matter of her correspondence, the person to whom the letter was addressed and the scribe to whom it was dictated. Lastly, Margaret Paston is compared to other fifteenth-century women who wrote letters. The subject matter of their letters, experiences which they had in common, the similarities and differences in their attitudes towards their husbands and children are discussed, and Margaret as a woman is compared to Dame Agnes Plumpton and Dame Elizabeth Stonor.

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THE PASTON FAMILY



CHAPTER I

The artless writers of these letters here communicate their private affairs, or relate the reports of the day; they tell their tale in the plain and uncouth phrase of the time: they aim not at shining by art or eloquence, and bespeak credit by total carelessness of correction and ornament.

The principal satisfaction of the reader will arise from two sources. He will hear the events of the moment from persons living at the time; and will see the manners and usages of that age, painted in the most familiar language, undisguised and unadorned....

The sufferings of warriors, the distresses of private life, occasioned by so tempestuous a season, and the concise rapidity of the narratives, will present a truer picture of that turbulent period than could be exhibited by the artful pencil of a sedate historian.¹

The Paston Letters, about which their first editor, Sir John Fenn, wrote the above words, consist of over a thousand documents, written from about 1420 to 1510. They include royal proclamations, wills, legal documents and letters written by such famous persons as Thomas Bouchier, Archbishop of Canterbury; Warwick the King-Maker; Henry VI; Edward IV; the Earl of Oxford, and other important men of the fifteenth century, but the greater part of the letters was written by members of the Paston family or to them by their friends and servants.

The Pastons were a Norfolk family who took their name from the village of Paston near the North Sea coast where they lived. Although, like any family with pretensions to gentility, they claimed Norman ancestry and Thomas Fuller in his Worthies (1660) says that they were "from Wolstan de Paston who three years after the Conquest came into

England",² they did not become a prominent family until the time of Justice William Paston (1378-1444). He, however, was much indebted to his ambitious and far-seeing father, Clement Paston. An opponent of the Paston family described Clement as a hard-working husbandman who had "a five score or a six score of land at the most, and much thereof bond-land to Gemyngham Hall.... Other livelode nor manors had he none there, nor in none other place."³ According to his unfriendly biographer, Clement married a bondwoman, the sister of Geoffrey de Somerton, himself a bondman. To refute this accusation, probably made by Judge Yelverton in 1465,⁴ William's grandson, Sir John Paston, was able to produce sufficient evidence to show that, far from being poor, the Pastons themselves had been the owners of bondsmen and had been sufficiently wealthy in the reign of Henry III to give "lyvelyhood to houses of religion" (Gairdner, 554).⁵

William was sent to London where he studied law. He justified his father's hopes, for he was soon appointed Steward to the Bishop of Norwich; moreover, the trust that people placed in him is seen by the number of families who appointed him a trustee of their property or an executor of their wills. "A wyse man of the lawe" (Davis, 14), he became a serjeant of the Court of Common Pleas in 1421 and eight years later was appointed a justice of the Court of Common Pleas. He was long known as "the Good Judge".

William also became the owner of wide domains. At every opportunity he bought land around the family holdings and so made himself the chief landowner in Paston. His marriage to Agnes, daughter and

heiress of Sir Edmund Berry of Harlingbury Hall in Hertfordshire, brought him the manor of East Tuddenham in Norfolk while Agnes herself inherited the manors of Marlingford, Standstede and Harlingbury. Further purchases included Oxnead and the manor of Gresham, the retention of which was to give his wife and son much trouble after his death. Even though the times were unsettled and lawlessness abounded, William could not have foreseen the political upheavals that would occur during the Wars of the Roses; however, he must have been well aware that his rapid rise into the ranks of the landed gentry was viewed with displeasure by his neighbours, and, moreover, decisions which he had to hand down in his capacity of justice made enemies for him and his heirs. He therefore warned his sons that they must have a thorough knowledge of the law in order to protect and keep what he had gained for them. His eldest son, John, became a lawyer, and shortly after William's death, Agnes wrote to their second son, Edmond, "I...avyse yow to thynkke onis of the daie of yowre fadris counseyle to lerne the lawe; for he seyde manie tymis that ho so euer schuld dwelle at Paston schulde have nede to conne defende hymselfe" (Davis, 14).

Agnes herself appears to have been a hard, shrewd business-woman, well able to look after herself and her property after the death of her husband. We know nothing about the preliminaries of her own marriage to William, but it was probably the result of a level-headed business transaction as most marriages were among well-to-do people in the Middle Ages. She certainly had no patience or sympathy with her

daughter Elizabeth when it was time for her to marry; indeed Agnes appears to have had a heart of stone. In an age when children were a means of enhancing the family position or estate by a suitable marriage, Elizabeth's refusal to accept the hand of Sir John Fastolf's stepson, Richard Scrope, was unforgivable. That he was a man of fifty, disfigured for life by a sickness which had lasted for the past thirteen or fourteen years, and that he was a widower with a grown daughter while Elizabeth was only nineteen were not factors to be considered. Agnes' method of dealing with a recalcitrant daughter are described by Elizabeth Clere, a cousin:

sche was never in so gret sorow as sche is now a dayes; for sche may not speke with no man, hosoever come, ne not may se ne speke with my man, ne with servauntes of hir moderys, but that sche bereth hire an hand otherwyse than she menyth. And sche hath son Esterne the most part be betyn onys in the weke or twyes, and somtyme twyse on o day, and hir hed broken in to or thre places (Davis, Clarendon, 12).
(Easter was three weeks previous to the time of writing!)

Not very much to our surprise, Elizabeth finally capitulated, but, for reasons we are not told, the arrangements were broken off. She remained unmarried for ten more years despite all the efforts of the family on her behalf. During this uneasy period, Agnes persisted in her rigid hostility to her daughter. In 1453, her daughter-in-law Margaret writes of her: "It semyth be my moderys langage þat she wold neuer so fayn to haue be delyueryd of her as she woll now" (Davis, 150). In the end, Elizabeth married Robert Poynings, was widowed three years later, married again, and upon the death of her second husband became, ironically, the wealthiest of all the Pastons.

Agnes had no less pity on her sons. Even Clement, who was twenty-one years younger than her eldest son, could expect no mercy from her for she requires that, if he has not done his "devere in lernyng," his master "wyll trewly belassch hym tyl he wyll amend"; she adds with approval, "And so ded the last mayster, and þe best that euer he had, attCaumbrege" (Davis, 28).

William and Agnes Paston's four sons, John, Edmond, William and Clement, were trained in the law. The eldest, to whom I shall refer as John I, received his education at Cambridge and at the Inner Temple but never gained the distinction which his father had enjoyed. When only twenty-three, he became heir to his father's estates and to the envy his father's prosperity had aroused. Some three or four years earlier, he had married Margaret, daughter and heiress of John Mauteby of Mauteby, thereby increasing the family estates by the acquisition of her manors of Mauteby, Sparham and other properties.

Although Margaret is the subject of this thesis, I shall do no more than introduce her at this point and return to the discussion of her husband. All his fortunes and misfortunes concerned her intimately, but I shall consider them from her point of view in Chapter III.

One critic has said of John that he "appears as a self-centred, dour and grasping creature, devoid of affection and, it would seem, of gratitude."⁶ These are harsh words, but it is quite true that one has to examine the letters carefully if one is to find any indication of a gentler John. One must remember, however, that John's letters were primarily business letters in which he may have been reluctant to

express any overt affection. He could praise his wife, however, when praise was due: "in god feyth ye aquyt yow rygth wel and discretly, and hertyly to yowr wurchep and myn" (Davis, 74). He could express concern: "Jon Hobbys tellith me þat ye be seekly, whечh me lekith not to here, prayi[n]g yow hartyly þat ye take what may do yow eese and spare not...þat ye fare þe wers for it" (Davis, 74). From prison, he addresses his wife as "Myn owne dere souereyn lady," and, with a kind of wry irony, thanks her "of the gret chere þat ye mad me here, to my gret cost and charge and labour" (Davis, 77). He ends the letter with some lines of verse of his own making which give a glimpse of an unsuspected side of the prosaic John who usually appears in The Paston Letters.

He had no patience with his eldest son who had none of his own business qualities and who apparently was not even attempting to seek favour when John managed to gain him a place in the king's household. On such occasions, when John wrote to Margaret, he referred to the boy as "yowre sone" (Davis, 73), a detail which shows how little people change over the centuries.

When John had cause to be angry, as he appears to have had when he wrote to Margaret, John Daubeney and Richard Calle in 1465, his wrath poured searingly upon wife and servants alike. He suggested that they assemble with the vicar and the domestic chaplain to decide what each member of the household was to do "so þat whanne I come home I haue not an excuse seying þat ye spoke to my seruauntes and þat Daubeney and Calle exkuse hem þat þei were so besy thei myght not

attende." He complained, "It liketh me evill to here þat my prestes and poremen be onpaijd, and þat no mony sent to me more thanne x mark be Berney of all this season," and begged, "I pray yow hertly put all your wittes to-gedir and see for the reformacion of it." He wished "an answeere of alle my lettirs and of euery article in hem," and he reminded them "þat myn heygh at Heylesdon the last yere was spent and wasted foull reklesly, and colored vnder my shep. I pray yow see þat I be not servid so this yere" (Davis, 72). Margaret would have had to be made of stern stuff if she did not shed a few tears upon receiving this missive from her "ryght worchepfull hosband."

Justice William had been so respected in the area that, though his rise had been viewed with distrust, he had been left in relative peace. The resentment, however, was visited upon his wife and son after the Justice's death. Agnes reports such an instance in a letter to Edmond in 1445. A man named Palmer, a tenant of the Justice, was now required to pay rent by the lord of "Gymmyngham": "Geffreie axid Palmere why the rentte was notte axid in myn husbonddis tyme, and Palmere seyde, for he was a grete man and a wyse man of the lawe, and that was the cawse men wolde not axe hym the rentte" (Davis, 14).

Two of the Justice's purchases were to cause great distress to John and Margaret Paston. The manor of Oxnead had been settled upon Agnes but, after William's death, her right to it was disputed by John Hauteyn to whose family it had formerly belonged. John Hauteyn was not allowed to hold property because he had entered the order of Carmelite Friars, but he claimed that he had been forced into the order "against

his will while under age."⁷ He seems to have succeeded in getting a Papal dispensation releasing him from his vows; then, as a layman, he appealed to the courts to have his inheritance restored to him. Through the influence of the Duke of Suffolk, he had hopes of succeeding but, after Suffolk's fall, he seems to have abandoned the effort. According to Blomefield, who wrote a history of Norfolk, "he and others of the Hauteyn family released their rights to Agnes Paston"⁸ in about 1450.

William had also purchased the manor of Gresham from Thomas Chaucer, son of the poet. In the reign of Edward II, Gresham had belonged to an Edmund Bacon, from whom it descended to his two daughters, Margaret and Margery. Margaret's moiety descended to Thomas Chaucer who married her granddaughter. Margery's became the property of Sir William Molyne upon his marriage to her but she outlived him and, although Blomefield gives details which differ from those in the letters, it seems that in her will she required that her moiety of the manor be sold. Whether through default of the Molyne family to purchase it or not, Thomas Chaucer bought it and sold both moieties to William Paston, from whom it descended to his heir, John. However, Robert Hungerford, son of Lord Hungerford, had married Eleanor, a descendant of Sir William Molyne who, having been raised to the peerage as Lord Molyne, claimed Gresham. John Heydon, a lawyer, and his patron, Sir Thomas Tuddenham, enjoying the favour of the Duke of Suffolk, encouraged Lord Molyne in his claim with the result that, in February 1448, he took possession of Gresham. With such powerful adversaries, John Paston tried for some months to arrive at a peaceful

settlement by discreet means. He enlisted the aid of Waynflete, Bishop of Winchester, and travelled to Salisbury to wait upon Lord Molyne but, finding himself continually put off, he resorted to the same force as had been used against him and took possession of a house in the village of Gresham. Nothing happened for three months until January 1450, when a thousand men attacked the house while John was in London, carried Margaret out forcibly, rifled the contents of the house (estimated by John at two hundred pounds) and left the place little better than a ruin. Threats were made against John's life and that of his friend, John Damme.

In order to understand why such high-handed deeds of violence could take place in the middle of the fifteenth century, it is necessary to consider briefly the history of those years. There were two factors which were responsible. The first was the economic imbalance which owed its origins partly to the Black Death of 1348-9 with the resulting dearth of labourers and the rise in wages and prices, partly to the growth of a wealthy middle class (largely from the wool trade) and their demand for education and a voice in government. The second was the weakness of the crown. Since the time of Edward III, there had been two lengthy minorities and a usurpation of the throne with only the brilliant but short reign of Henry V, flashing like a meteor through the early fifteenth century, to relieve the gloom. His successor, the ten-month-old Henry VI, was first guided by his powerful uncles, then by the Earl of Suffolk, a brave man who had distinguished himself in the wars with France. The Earl easily persuaded the

amiable, pious King to marry Margaret of Anjou on terms which were disastrous for England as Margaret brought no dowry and England ceded Maine, which was the gateway to Normandy, and Anjou to her father. Although the arrangement was a blow to the pride of Englishmen and did not result in the hoped-for peace with France, it established Suffolk firmly not only in the King's but also in the new queen's favour. He was first raised to the dignity of a marquis and later to that of a duke.

It was this man, the Duke of Suffolk, who was protecting such people as Tuddenham and Heydon, those making it impossible for John Paston to obtain justice in the local courts of law. One wonders why the Duke should have protected such villains but it is quite likely that he did not see them as such, rather as members of his own class, while he viewed John Paston as an ambitious upstart who, no matter how hard-working and honest he was, should be kept in his place. With strife and confusion at the top level of government, a duke could do as he wished, take what he wanted, protect those who flattered him, and manipulate the local courts to suit himself. The surprising thing is that the Pastons, in writing of his death, express no rancour; in fact, they seem to regard him as an unfortunate neighbour to be greatly pitied. After his death, Henry VI was left to the tender mercies of his strong-minded, selfish queen who would have ruled in his stead had it not been for the Duke of York. While the weak and ambivalent King was tossed about like a pawn, Queen Margaret and the Yorkists fought out the Wars of the Roses, which were only to end with

the Battle of Bosworth in 1485, the year after Margaret Paston's death.

Meanwhile in 1450, it was hoped that the Duke of York would visit Norfolk and that men who had been wronged could gain justice. Even the King was reported to be displeased by the lawlessness in Norfolk, expressly mentioning Tuddenham and Heydon by name. Moreover, the appearance of a new sheriff of Norwich, John Jermyn, was encouraging. However, the Oyer and Terminer which should have been held at Norwich was held at Walsingham where Tuddenham and Heydon had most of their supporters; of all the numerous complainants, only John Paston dared open his mouth. Despite the King's alleged desire for law and order, when John procured indictments against Lord Molyne and his men for their conduct at Gresham, Sheriff Jermyn told him that he had been directed by the King to acquit Lord Molyne. Molyne, however, seems to have dropped his claim, and the last we hear of the affair is John Paston's attempt to come to a financial settlement with Molyne's retainers.

In 1452, the King again interested himself in Norfolk and sent the Duke of Norfolk to investigate. John Paston had been attacked at the door of Norwich Cathedral by Charles Nowell and five of his men, who were responsible for many outrages in the vicinity including injuries which led to the death of Margaret's uncle, Philip Berney. But Nowell and his associates were well protected and supported by noblemen and country gentlemen, for it seems that they were not mere brigands, but the product of Yorkist-Lancastrian rivalry.⁹ The Duke of Norfolk instigated an inquiry into this new piece of lawlessness,

but, as so often happens in the letters, we do not hear the outcome; as long as there were problems, they were discussed, but, when they had been settled, obviously all concerned knew the result and, to our frustration, they were no longer mentioned.

John Paston seems, however, to have been well thought of in Norfolk. As early as 1450, it was suggested that he make an attempt to be returned for Parliament and even before this he had become the intimate friend and confidant of Sir John Fastolf. Fastolf, an old soldier who had distinguished himself at Agincourt with Henry V and who had been first entrusted with the government of Normandy and later with that of Anjou and Maine, may have been related to John Paston. He refers to John Paston as cousin more than once, but as this term was often used quite loosely, we cannot rely on Fastolf's use of it to denote relationship. However, William II reports to John that Fastolf "saythe 3e are the hartiest kynysman and frynd pat he knowyt" (Davis, 83), and Agnes confirms a kinship: "I suppose pat Ser John Fastolf, and he were spoke to, wolde be gladere to lete his kensemen han parte than straunge men" (Davis, 25). She makes the kinship between Fastolf and herself more specific when she adds, "Asay him in my name of suych places as ye suppose is most clere."¹⁰ Fastolf, one of the richest men in England, seems to have had the greatest respect for John's integrity and business ability and, even before he came to live at Caister, made use of John's services. When at over seventy Fastolf was finally released from his duties to the King, he fulfilled a long desire to build a stately castle on his

ancestral lands at Caister close to Margaret's home at Mauteby. The castle must have been an impressive sight for Gairdner says that at the beginning of the twentieth century the ruined tower still rose ninety feet high and that the foundations showed that the castle enclosed more than six acres of ground.¹¹ In 1454 when the castle was completed Fastolf came from London and remained in it until he died in 1459. There he seems to have spent his time calculating unsettled claims from the crown and other of his countrymen. (In 1452, he lent the Duke of York over four hundred pounds for which he had jewels in surety.) To settle his account with Heaven, he planned the foundation of a college at Caister for seven priests or a religious endowment for seven poor people. He probably needed to settle this account, for his stinginess towards his relatives and servants is attested to both by William Worcestre (Botoner), his faithful secretary, and his stepson, Stephen Scrope, who wrote "He bought and sold me as a beast."¹² This is the same Scrope whom Agnes Paston tried to force her daughter Elizabeth to marry.

When Fastolf died, he left all his lands in Norfolk and Suffolk to John Paston and his chaplain, Sir Thomas Howes. It is in this way that The Paston Letters are enriched by having many of Fastolf's papers included in them, but while John Paston was made wealthy by Fastolf's will, the enmity his inheritance aroused and the worry and labour involved caused him great toil and unhappiness for the rest of his life.

Without the inheritance, he could probably have lived a much longer and happier life. His position in Norfolk seemed to be very secure and he was in royal favour — he had been offered a knighthood

by Henry VI which he had declined, and was perhaps to have received the same honour at the Coronation of Edward IV. This, too, he declined, managing to have it transferred to his eldest son, John II, who was made a knight two years later. In 1460, John Paston had been returned to Parliament, was returned again in 1461, and apparently was in such good standing with Edward that he was resident in the King's household for a short time. Moreover, he was able to obtain a place for John II in the King's household and, upon the death of the Duke of Norfolk, obtained a position for his second son, John III, in the young Duke's household.

However, John Paston senior, ever intent on increasing the family holdings, was not the man to turn his back on Fastolf's estates, nor were the great men of the neighbourhood willing to let him have them without a fight, for it seems that there was some question about the validity of the will by which these estates were left to John. In previous wills, John Paston had been only one of several executors, among whom were Judge Yelverton and William Jenney; it was only in an addition to his last will dictated on his deathbed that Fastolf favoured John Paston so exclusively, so there were accusations that John had falsified the will. In the fifteenth century, wills were probated in Ecclesiastical Courts, which were held in London, while questions of property were the domain of local courts; John was thus kept busy travelling between London and Norwich to keep an eye on his interests in both courts. Meanwhile two of his co-executors, Judge Yelverton and William Jenny, took possession of some of Fastolf's Suffolk manors.

While trying to protect his property from them, Paston neglected a summons from the King. Clement Paston wrote to his brother John in considerable anxiety that the King had said, "'We have sent two privy sealyes to Paston by two yoemen of our chamber, and he disobeyeth þem; but we will send him a-noder tomorrowe, and by Gods mercye and if he come not then he xall dye for it'" (Davis, 117). Upon receiving this dire warning, John hurried to London, where he was thrown into the Fleet Prison. He was immediately released when the King was made acquainted with the facts but, while he was following the King to Marlborough to obtain a license for the foundation of a College of Priests at Caister in accordance with Fastolf's will, he was unable to attend the County Court, was proclaimed an outlaw and again thrown into the Fleet.

Early in 1464, the Duke of Suffolk claimed Drayton and Hellesdon, two of Fastolf's manors which Paston had inherited. John Paston evidently could not leave London, and a family conference was held there in 1464; then in 1465, when John was again in the Fleet, Margaret journeyed up to London to confer with him. On her way back, she occupied the manor at Cotton and, through the good services of the Duke of Norfolk, an agreement was reached with Yelverton for a truce. However, this was the opportunity the Duke of Suffolk was waiting for. Margaret had outwitted him at Drayton, but the Duke's men attacked the manor at Hellesdon, where "the logge and the remenaunte of your place was betyn down" (Davis, 194), and the village and church were sacked. Later Drayton, too, was taken. With two of the manors which he had

inherited from Fastolf gone, and his rights to Cotton awaiting settlement, the Ecclesiastical Court still hearing evidence concerning the will, John Paston, worn out by his labours, died in London in May, 1466.

Thus Margaret was left a widow when she was about forty-five years old with seven children, at least three of whom were under twelve years of age. During her twenty-six years of married life, she had been her husband's able lieutenant during his many absences from home, managing the family estates, keeping an eye on her husband's interests in and around Norwich in addition to her normal duties as housewife in a fifteenth-century manor. When John Paston's estates passed to his eldest son and heir, John II, Margaret remained completely in charge, although she was always careful to refer to the family holdings as "your estates" and to report family matters to him as the new head of the family.

John II was a great disappointment to his mother as he had been to his father, who had at one time turned him out of the house for disobedience and idleness. In an age when the talents of a businessman and a lawyer were most needed, John II was far more a courtier and lover. Although he never married, his friend Daverse declared, "Ye be the best cheser of a gentellwoman that I know" (Davis, Clarendon, 47). There was, however, a long suit for the hand of Mrs. Anne Hawte, a lady of English ancestry living in Calais. As a courtier, he seemed to be high in the favour of Edward IV, whom he accompanied with his younger brother, John III, to Flanders in 1468 on the occasion of the marriage of the King's sister, Margaret, to Charles

the Bold, Duke of Burgundy. John III writes enthusiastically to Margaret, "as for the Dwkys coort, as of lordy[s], ladys, and gentylwomen, knylys, sqwyrs, and gentyllmen, I herd neuer of non lyek to it saue Kyng Artourys cort" (Davis, 330).

But as far as Margaret and the family were concerned, a hard-headed businessman was needed to carry on the fight for Fastolf's estates. The litigation in the Ecclesiastical Court finally terminated fifteen months after John I's death. John II and Bishop Waynflete, who was now acting as sole executor, agreed to divide all Fastolf's lands between them and agreed that John II should surrender all the title deeds but those of Caister. It was also decided that, instead of founding a College for Priests at Caister, the money should be spent to maintain seven priests and seven poor scholars at Magdalen College, Oxford. The Duke of Norfolk, who had occupied Caister once before, took advantage of the overthrow of Edward IV by Warwick in 1469 and attacked Caister. John III put up a brave resistance but, without aid or support from John II who was in London, was forced to surrender. Margaret writes sadly, "As fore þe 3elddyng of the place at Caster... ma[n]ly of owr wele-wylleres arn putte to loosse fore owr sakys" (Davis, 205). John II was shocked into reality by this loss and for the next few years attempted, through his influence at court, to regain Caister, which he finally succeeded in doing upon the death of the Duke of Norfolk in 1475, more by luck than by his business ability. Meanwhile, to finance his high life in London, he sold one manor, mortgaged others, sold woods and pawned the family plate. Margaret, at times remonstrating, at times reproaching, and always in

need of money, watched the family fortune being depleted.

John III was much more able and responsible than his elder brother. It was he who stayed at home and helped Margaret in the battle to keep Fastolf's estates, it was he who attempted to compensate for John II's irresponsible squandering, and it was he who was the object of Margery Brews' tender love letters. He hardly seems to have deserved them for, much like his father, he went about looking for a wife in a hard-headed businesslike way, even referring to one possible young woman as "the thing".

Like his elder brother, John III was a soldier who fought in the French Wars with Edward IV but, in 1471, both brothers fought on the Lancastrian side and were then obliged to take advantage of a pardon from Edward IV. After John II's death in 1479, John III became heir to the Paston lands and in 1485 he was made High Sheriff of Norfolk. Two years later he was knighted by Henry VII after the Battle of Stoke.

Of Margaret's other five children, Walter, born sometime later than 1455, was her favourite. We hear most of him in connection with his studies at Oxford, where he took his Bachelor's degree after six years. He had thoughts of becoming a priest but died in 1479 while still at Oxford.

William, born in 1459, was at Eton in 1478-9 and entered the service of the Earl of Oxford in 1488, but sometime after 1495 the Earl was obliged to send him home to John III because "your broder William, my servaunte, ys so troubelid with sekenes and crasid in his

mynde" (Gairdner, 940). Edmond II was at home, unhappy under the domination of the family chaplain, Sir James Gloys, and acting as his mother's amanuensis between the years 1469 and 1472.

Of the daughters, Margery shocked the family by pledging herself to Richard Calle, the family bailiff. Since a pledge was as sacred as marriage itself in the fifteenth century, the family was forced to allow the marriage to take place despite their displeasure. Anne was married to William Yelverton, the grandson of the well-known Justice. Margery pre-deceased her mother, but Anne lived until 1494 or 1495.

We have 104 letters written by Margaret and many others which members of her family wrote to her; thus a woman who lived five hundred years ago comes alive as we read. And when we read of her masterly handling of her many roles, as the wife of an exacting husband, as the daughter-in-law of imperious old Agnes, as the mother of a large family, as the mistress of several manors all of which she kept in running order, as head of the family during her husband's many absences from Norfolk, as "captainess" when defending her estates from armed attack, our admiration and awe grow. Unlike her husband, she was able to express her love in her letters. Knowing how deeply she could love, we can appreciate her feelings when there were differences between her husband and son, when her husband died prematurely, when in that dreadful year of 1479 she lost not only old Agnes and John II but her favourite child Walter as well, probably all victims of the plague. There is even the possibility that Margery died

in the same year.

There must have been many fine women in the fifteenth century, but few of whom so much was required and few indeed who rose to each difficult occasion as Margaret Paston did. That we have a record of her life in The Letters is our good fortune, for in them we become acquainted with living, breathing people.

In the next chapter, I shall consider the level of education which led to the writing of letters in the fifteenth century, I shall consider the few collections which have survived from that period, and I shall examine the value of The Paston Letters as evidence of the life and times and particularly of the language in England five centuries ago.

CHAPTER II

In 1732, William Paston, second Earl of Yarmouth, died leaving no heir. When his estate was dispersed, a large collection of manuscripts which had been in the family for over two hundred years was acquired by various antiquaries. Eventually they came into the hands of John Fenn who saw that the papers consisted of letters and documents written by people of rank and importance during the reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV, Richard III and Henry VII. He very carefully edited the letters and published an annotated selection in two volumes in 1787. For this service he was knighted by George III, to whom he presented the corresponding originals. Two years later, Fenn published another two volumes and before his death in 1794 had prepared a fifth and final volume which his nephew, Mr. Sergeant Frere, published in 1823. Although the manuscripts of Volumes III to V were not presented to the King, they and the originals of Volumes I and II were amazingly lost. When all hope of recovering them had been abandoned, the originals of Volume V along with others which Fenn had not published were discovered in the Cambridgeshire home of Sergeant Frere's son Philip in 1865. He sold them to the British Museum where they are contained in four volumes: Add. MSS. 27,443-46. Ten years later, the originals of Volumes III and IV with ninety-five unpublished letters were found at Roydon Hall near Diss, Norfolk, the home of the head of the Frere family. They too were acquired by the British Museum and

occupy two volumes: Add. MSS. 34,888 and 34,889. Finally, in 1889, the originals of Volumes I and II were found at Orwell Park where they may have been among the papers of Bishop Tomline, tutor of William Pitt. The British Museum contains other manuscripts of the Paston collection in Add. MSS. 27,447-55; 33,957; 35,251, and there are a few in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, at Pembroke College, Cambridge and in other collections.

The collection of documents soon came to be labelled The Paston Letters, and Dr. James Gairdner started to re-edit them in 1872. This edition, augmented from manuscripts that Fenn had not published, was further enlarged in 1901 and finally revised in a definitive six-volume edition in 1904.

At the time of preparing his 1901 edition, the lost originals of The Paston Letters were just beginning to come to light, but Gairdner was so impressed by the care with which Fenn had transcribed the originals that he made few changes of the text in his 1904 edition. The changes he made involved the rearrangement of letters in chronological order so that he was able to eliminate the various supplements and appendices of the 1901 edition. Since Gairdner's edition, there has been much progress in the fields of paleography and linguistics and Norman Davis, who has made a special study of the Pastons and their letters, has been able to show that there are many errors in Gairdner's text which have suggested that the Paston's orthography and syntax were far more erratic than they are now known to have been. In his article, 'The Text of Margaret Paston's Letters,' Davis shows, for example, that

every instance of the apparent use of e[ɛ] for Middle English ā[a], which seemed to indicate fronting is the result of a misreading of the manuscript.¹ Davis is now publishing his new definitive edition of The Paston Letters, of which Part I, containing the letters of the immediate family, has been used as far as possible for this thesis.

The fifteenth century, like the eleventh, has long been thought of as a barren era — the lull before the storm. While it is quite true that it did not produce a Chaucer, a "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" poet, or a Wycliffe as the century before it had, it was in fact a century of steady intellectual and artistic growth, preparing the way for the Reformation and the Renaissance. It was a century in which the great cycles of mystery plays flourished and in which those magnificent buildings were constructed in a truly English style — the Gothic perpendicular; it was a century which saw the victory of the English language over Anglo-French and Latin as the medium of written documents, and it was the century which saw the widespread gain in literacy among the middle classes.

During the reign of Henry IV, although the vast majority of prose was in French or Latin, English was beginning to be used. The earliest will in English appeared in 1387² and the first private letters to be written in English were those of Sir John Hawkwood to Thomas Cogeshall in 1392 and 1393.³ The Stonor Correspondance, too, contains a few fourteenth-century letters in English,⁴ but at the beginning of the fifteenth century the use of English in written documents was the exception rather than the rule.

The short reign of Henry V saw a marked upsurge in the use of English as the chancery language. The reason is not hard to find, for the Battle of Agincourt in 1415 gained for England not only extensive territories on the Continent but also a resurgence of national pride which had been all but extinguished in 1066 and had burned only dimly for three and a half centuries. The victor of Agincourt, Henry V himself, could and did write English⁵ and the fact that Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, could speak French fluently was regarded as an accomplishment.⁶ Indeed, even though many Englishmen continued to read and write French, the ability to speak it had become a special accomplishment after the third quarter of the fourteenth century.⁷ From 1416 on (one year after Agincourt), English was the favourite language for proclamations, the latest proclamation in French being in 1431,⁸ although Latin and French were still used for foreign diplomacy. In the private correspondence of this reign, English and French were used about equally. It is interesting to note that before 1450 Charles the Bold found it expedient to write to the governor of Calais in English — and in his own hand! By the middle of Henry VI's reign, that is, circa 1455, English had become the usual medium for written communication⁹ and indeed, among The Paston Letters, there are only two in French later than 1426.¹⁰ In The Paston Letters, we have an interesting account of Fastolf's secretary William Worcester's setting himself the task of learning French in order to translate a French version of Cicero's de Senectute for his master. (Gairdner, 318).

Concurrently with the rise of English as the written language

came the rise in education for all classes above mere labourers which resulted in the growth of a literate public with a knowledge of English only.¹¹ Among the benevolent works of the guilds were the founding and maintaining of free grammar schools, and in Norfolk there were grammar schools in Norwich, Thetford, Shipden and other places.¹² At the beginning of the century, there had been only three licensed schools in London, all of which had existed from the twelfth century, but by the middle of the fifteenth century there were at least ten or twelve.¹³ Besides grammar schools, there were private boarding schools and family chaplains who tutored the children and wards of the families to which they were attached. The fourth decade of the fifteenth century seems to have been in a ferment of educational zeal; in 1445 no less than four grammar schools were founded in London,¹⁴ Henry VI founded Eton in 1440 and King's College Cambridge in 1441, and his queen was responsible for the founding of Queens' College in 1446. Oxford, too, saw the establishment of three colleges during the fifteenth century. Higher education was provided by the two universities, Oxford and Cambridge, as well as by the several Inns of Court in London.

We have no record of the early education of Justice William's sons although he himself was probably sent to a private boarding school.¹⁵ However, John I was at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, when he was fifteen or sixteen and later at Peterhouse, where he seems to have remained until he was twenty or twenty-one.¹⁶ Two of his brothers also went to Cambridge and a third was at Clifford's Inn in London while John himself completed his studies at the Inner Temple. John's sons had

similar advantages. Walter took his Bachelor's degree at Oxford and William went to Eton, apparently the only one of the boys to attend that fairly new school. We know little about the education of the two older sons except for the fact that William III in writing to John III (Davis, 407) seems to assume that John can appreciate his Latin verses — an assumption that suggests that John III has shared his school experiences. However, both John II and John III could write descriptive, lively and at times amusing letters in their own hands of which we have ample evidence in The Paston Letters. John II, in addition, was a great lover of books. He bought and collected manuscripts and also hired scribes and illuminators to copy famous or useful works for him (Gairdner, 596). Moreover, several letters from him concern his anxiety to obtain the books of Sir James Gloys, the family chaplain, when he died. Among the books owned by the Pastons were Arthurian and other romances, works of Chaucer and Lydgate, religious and didactic, historical and heraldic works, as well as several Latin Classics and "2 French books".¹⁷

Although there were few facilities for formal education for girls, some may have been boarders at convents¹⁸ while others doubtless were taught at home by the family clerk along with their brothers. There is no proof yet that the Paston women wrote their own letters. For a long time Agnes was thought to have written at least one to her husband, for she ends it with "for defaute of a good secretarye" (Davis, 13). However, Norman Davis has identified the hand of that letter as that of a clerk who wrote at least part of a draft of a

letter for Justice William (Davis, 6). Whether Agnes drafted her husband's letter for him or whether she was making a playful comment at the clerk's expense is not known; if the latter, her dating of the same letter as "þe Wednesday next after Deus qui errantibus", these being the opening words of the Collect for the third Sunday after Easter, might be part of the same joke. To find such a sense of humour in the usually stern Agnes would be welcome indeed. Agnes may have been able to read as she had a book in her possession in 1434, which was lent to her by a burgess of Great Yarmouth and was to be returned to his son.¹⁹

There is no proof that Margaret could write, either, although it is possible that she could read. John II suggests to John III: "I praye yow schewe ore rede to my moodre..." (Davis, 248).²⁰ Margaret's daughter Anne could probably read too, as she owned at least one book for John III refers to "a book of my syster Annys of þe Sege of Thebes" (Davis, 352). And John III's wife, Margery Brews, though she usually employed an amanuensis, could add a phrase or two in a "tremulous, totally unformed hand".²¹ Among the Stonor women, "Jane Stonor wrote tolerably but spelt atrociously. Her daughter-in-law Elizabeth generally employed an amanuensis, but could write well enough if she pleased."²²

The Paston Letters, then, are evidence of the spread of literacy to a wide cross-section of middle-class people, for the letters are not only written by members of the family itself but by their friends and very frequently by people in their employ. Their bailiff, Richard

Calle, wrote clear, lucid business letters to his masters in his own hand. Dr. Gairdner says, "No person of any rank or station in society above mere labouring men appears to have been wholly illiterate. All could write letters; most persons could express themselves in writing with ease and fluency."²³ He is perhaps being overly sanguine in the light of more recent studies²⁴ but his wish to stress the high level of literacy in the fifteenth century is, I think, justified. Probably the worst writers were the nobility of whom we have an example in Fastolf; he could barely write his name, and was so impatient with the process of letter-writing that he sometimes could not wait until the end of the letter to sign it (Gairdner, 128).

At first glance, the writing of letters in the fifteenth century seems to have been a rare activity. Isolated private letters are not uncommon, but collections of letters are rare. When we consider, however, how few of our own personal letters will survive into the next century, let alone five centuries from now, we realize what a vast number of fifteenth-century letters must have succumbed to the yearly turning-out of fastidious housewives, destruction by fire, whether accidentally or on purpose, and the ravages of time. Many writers must have included such instructions as Richard Calle's to his betrothed: "As sone as ye have redde it (this letter) lete it be brent, for I wolde no man schulde se it in no wice" (Davis, Clarendon, 54). But John Paston saved all his papers, regardless of his correspondents' wishes, as his father had done before him and drafts of his own letters to other people. Soon after his death, Margaret wrote to his heir, John II, "I avyse you to be ware that ye kepe wysly youre wrytyngys that ben of

charge, that it com not in here handys that may hurt you hereaftere. Youre fadere, wham God assole, in hys trobyll seson set more by hys wrytyngys and evydens then he dede by any of his moveabell godys" (Davis, 198). John II continued the practice, but his younger brother, John III, allowed it to lapse. Thus, The Paston Letters have survived through a family tradition of keeping its papers.

Other collections have been preserved for the delight and enlightenment of twentieth-century readers through litigation. When Sir William Stonor was implicated in the Duke of Buckingham's rebellion against Richard III in October 1483 and was attainted, his papers were siezed. Those in the Cely collection were also saved from destruction in the same way.²⁵

Through chance, six collections of private letters have come to us from the fifteenth century. Second only to The Paston Letters in providing a picture of the social life of the times is The Stonor Correspondence, which contains 275 letters and documents pertaining to an ancient family of Stonor in Oxfordshire. The collection contains some of the oldest private letters written in English, but the bulk of the letters centre around Sir Thomas Stonor (d. 1474) and his son Sir William Stonor, (d. 1494). Although Sir William was a courtier and a gentleman, he was actively concerned with the wool trade, as the Stonors had great sheep runs on their estates in the Chilterns and the Cotswolds. He married Elizabeth Riche, the daughter and widow of wealthy city merchants,²⁶ and he entered into partnership with a friend of his wife's, Thomas Betson, a Merchant of the Staple, who was later

to marry Elizabeth's daughter, Katherine Riche. There is little concerning politics in The Stonor Correspondence, but much concerning family affairs, business and litigation. Perhaps the most delightful group of letters in all the fifteenth-century collections are those from Thomas Betson in which he speaks lovingly and longingly of the child to whom he was affianced. His love letter to her when she was thirteen is a gem which would be difficult for the most accomplished writer of any age to surpass (S.L., 166).²⁷

Thomas Betson was known to two other Merchants of the Staple, George and Richard Cely, for their cousin and agent in Calais wrote to George in London in 1481 to advise him about 464 fells dispatched, "the sayd felles lyeth nexte be afte the maste lowest under the felles of Thomas Bettson" (C.P., 67).²⁸ The Cely Papers, which extend from 1475-1488, consist of the business correspondence of this family of London merchants and wool mongers. Of value for their picture of social and economic life, they describe England's commercial relations with Flanders and the keeping of Calais where the Celys had a place of business. There are frequent references to those political matters which had a bearing on business, and occasionally there are deliberate but guarded "tidings" of a political event.

The Plumpton Correspondence is that of an ancient family settled near Knaresborough in Yorkshire from the time of the Conquest onwards. Similar to the Paston and Stonor Letters, the main subjects of the letters of this family are family disputes and lawsuits, of interest from a social point of view. Most of the letters are from the reign

of Henry VIII; less than forty of the total of 241 are earlier than 1485. The first document is a summons from Henry VI to Sir William Plumpton before the Battle of Towton. Two letters from correspondents in London give Sir William political information, and both the Scottish invasion of 1480 and Buckingham's rebellion of 1483 are mentioned.

The Letters and Papers of John Shillingford deal with a lawsuit involving the mayor, John Shillingford, and citizens of Exeter vs. Edmund Lacy, the bishop, between the years 1447-50. His letters are written to his friends at home while he was in London urging the case with the Chancellor. They are remarkable in that they are written in Standard London English, like those of Justice William Paston, with few provincialisms.²⁹

Another small group of private letters are the Trevelyan Papers which relate to the Duke of Suffolk's unpopular colleague, John Trevelyan, and which include prayers and hymns commemorative of Henry VI.

Of all the collections of fifteenth-century private letters, The Paston Letters are by far the most extensive and varied. Containing letters written by people from many walks of life and from different levels of society, The Letters have many elements in common which indicate that letter-writing was probably taught along with the teaching of reading and writing and that literate people would be expected to write letters. The Paston Letters, then, are valuable because they are not uncommon. Far from being rare self-conscious literary

compositions, most of The Letters are informal, unself-conscious records of day-to-day life, which afford the student of political history a series of unprejudiced opinions and criticisms written by an outside observer. In a frank and simple manner, they record details and small facts that may often be omitted in less informal writings.

As there were no newspapers at the time, some of The Paston Letters were written expressly to convey information about politics and public affairs, but the majority of them supply such information incidentally. While the family may not have taken a keen interest in the wars in France, they were much concerned about the lack of protection of the coastline. Living close to the Norfolk coast, they lived in fear and dread of the marauding enemy who, as Margaret Paston writes, "ben so bolde that they kom vp to þe lond and pleyen hem on Caster sondys and in othere plases as homely as they were Englyschmen" (Davis, 136). While they may not have realized that the weakness of Henry VI and the rise of a strong nobility inherited from the time of Richard II was a cause of their distress in Norfolk, they were very well aware of the power of the Duke of Suffolk and of his protection of such men as Tuddenham and Heydon. As far as the crown was concerned, they seemed to be able to swing with the times. During Henry VI's reign, they rejoice when he recovers from his illness and is shown his infant son. When Edward IV takes the throne, they serve in his household, accompanying him to France both as courtiers and as soldiers. Whether they were Lancastrian at heart or whether they misjudged the forces of Henry and Edward, they joined the losing side at Barnet and

were obliged to take advantage of Edward's general pardon, but what their true feelings were, their caution prevents us from knowing. However, we are given a good picture of the effects of fifteenth-century politics at the local level.

To the student of social history, the letters are of even more value, for they afford those intimate, unself-conscious glimpses of everyday life that history books tend to neglect. In The Paston Letters we see the ambition of a family to enter the ranks of the landed gentry and their struggle through litigation and sometimes violence to maintain the property they acquire. We see local arguments arising from jealousy of their new-found positions: Agnes tells of conflict with the vicar over a road which Justice William obtained permission to move, "and nowe he hathe pullid uppe the doolis and seithe he wolle makyn a dyche fro the cornere of his walle ryght overe the weye" (Davis, 14). Three fifths of the letters were written during the married life of John I and Margaret and, in them, we have a picture of the running of a feudal manor -- troubles with tenants, falling rents, whose responsibility it was to fix broken windows, the price of crops; moreover this picture is given from the points of view of the head of the family often away in London, of his wife coping on the spot, of the bailiff trying to carry out their orders, and of friends who can be of help.

We have an "on the spot" commentary on the education and interests of the scholars of the family. We see Margaret making arrangements for Walter's journey to Oxford, we hear about his expenses there, his getting his degree and the feast he was to give to celebrate

the event. We hear of his very human regret that he had not been able to serve venison "but my gestys hewld them plesyd wyth such mete as they had" (Davis, 404). William is more exuberant and entirely human in his interest in clothing and in figs and raisins. He has been smitten by a young lady and, like a good, practical Paston, reports, "as for the mony and plate, it is redy when soo euer sche were weddyd", only then adding, "as for hyr bewté, juge yow that when 3e see hyr" (Davis, 407).

The search for desirable mates for their children absorbs the energies of the Pastons in a way that is novel to twentieth-century readers. We have already seen the desperate measures to which Agnes resorted to force Elizabeth into what was considered an advantageous marriage. We see Margaret's frustration and unbending attitude when Margery married a fine, dependable but poor man who did not increase the family fortunes other than by his loyal services. The family's fears that Anne might follow her heart rather than bend to their will are voiced several times and, when John III deems it time to marry, he has his older brother search out likely candidates in a completely heartless and business-like way. We find that marriage was, in fact, little more than a business transaction with bargaining on both sides. Indeed, Anne's marriage to Judge Yelverton's grandson was obviously delayed because the Pastons were not willing or able, under John II's inept handling of the estates, to provide her with an adequate dowry. John II writes of her, "Yelverton... seyde but late pat he wold haue hyre iff she had hyre mony, and ellis nott" (Davis, 282). On the

other hand, although there seems to have been affection for John III on the part of Margery Brews, the Pastons delayed his marriage in order to wring a larger dowry out of her parents. Margery writes pleadingly to John that her mother is trying to persuade her father to give more, "but sche can no more gete þen 3e knowe of" (Davis, 415), and Sir Thomas Brews himself puts the case to John II, "I were ryght lothe to bestowe so mech uppon on doghtur that the other hyr susters schuld fare the wars" (Davis, Clarendon, 82). We are greatly relieved to find that this marriage does eventually take place — that occasionally love overcomes all even in the fifteenth century. Unfortunately, although we are told so much about the bargaining that precedes a wedding, the wedding itself passes unmentioned. There are no wedding gowns, bridesmaids and marriage festivities in The Paston Letters. There are, however, the difficulties one could get into through a premature declaration of betrothal. It took John II seven years and a papal dispensation to free him from an attachment with Anne Haute and, when the Bishop of Norwich was appealed to over the unfortunate promise Margery had made to Richard Calle, he, after questioning them both closely, found the promise binding.

In a century during which the effects of Wycliffe and the Lollards were obviously felt in some quarters, we might expect to find the position of the Church very shaky, and its priests and their teachings held with little respect. The Paston Letters show us, however, that this was far from the case as far as the Pastons and their correspondents were concerned. The Church was an accepted and unquestioned part of their lives. Indeed, the only reference to the Lollards

that I have found in The Paston Letters appears in a jesting conclusion to a letter from John III to John II, "God kep yow thys Lent fro lollardy of fleshe" (Davis, 329) where "lollardy" seems to be synonymous with "sins". Most of the letters are dated according to the church year as in Margaret's ending "Wretyn at Caster þe Tewisday next be-for Seynt Edmond þe Kynge" (Davis, 175). The year itself is seldom mentioned, although Fastolf invariably dates his letters according to the year of the King's reign and the later letters of John II, John III and Edmond II show the day of the month and sometimes the year of the King's reign.

We find that pilgrimages were frequent. Margaret made more than one pilgrimage to Our Lady of Walsingham while John III went on foot to Canterbury in 1470, and three years later may have journeyed as far as the shrine of St. James of Compostella in Spain. The letters report the pilgrimages that great people such as the King and Queen made to Canterbury or that of the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk to Walsingham, which they made on foot. One of Agnes' letters to John I throws some light on the respect which pilgrims commanded for, when enemy vessels off the coast made a practice of seizing people on the sands, "they tokyn ij pylgremys, a man and a woman, and they robbyd the woman and lete hyr gon and ledde the man to the see, and whan they knew he was a pylgreme they geffe hym money and sett hym ageyn on the lond" (Davis, 20).

The advice of the parish priest was sought not only in spiritual but in temporal matters as well. As we saw in John's angry letter to

Margaret, the priest was to be consulted about the efficient management of the estates. He was also entrusted with business affairs and valuables were sometimes left for safe-keeping with him and in religious houses. As a mark of their prestige, the Pastons had a domestic chaplain, Sir James Gloys, who, like Fastolf's chaplain, Sir Thomas Howes, enjoyed the honorary title of "Sir". Like the priest, Sir James was entrusted with affairs pertaining to the Paston properties and, as I shall show later, he held a position of such high honour in the household that he could actually make life very miserable for Margaret's sons.

Like marriage, the sacrament of baptism is scarcely mentioned in the Letters, but the rites for the dead can be imagined from the requirements laid down in wills and from expense accounts which have survived. It is no surprise to find that the down-to-earth Pastons show no love of music, no love of natural beauty, no love of art, and the reader of their letters will look in vain for any appreciation of their possessions except in monetary terms.

We learn a great deal about the writing and sending of letters from The Paston Letters. Some were written by the authors in their own hand; others, particularly those of the women, John I and Sir John Fastolf, were written by clerks, the family chaplain, sons or friends. The difficulty of finding a trustworthy carrier is complained of, but when the carrier is known to be true, he is sometimes charged with delivering an oral message that might be compromising if the letter were to fall into the wrong hands. Sometimes a letter is written in

the hope that a carrier will be available; at other times, the man is actually waiting at the door, impatient to be on his way.

Although no manuals of letter-writing survive from this period, Norman Davis feels that some must have existed, for the expressions of respect and politeness seen in The Paston Letters are found not only in English and Anglo-Norman but in Continental letters as well and seem to have come from Monte Cassino in the eleventh century. The sequence of seven conventional phrases used in formal, respectful letters is usually shortened by Margaret to two: "Ryt wurchipful hwsbond, I recomawnd me to 3w" (Davis, 130) and are often simply referred to by John III: "Aftyr all dewtés of recomendacyon" (Davis, 371). Margaret's "I gret 3ow welle" (Davis, 216) is the customary greeting from parent to child and goes back to the twelfth century, but Agnes' "Dere housbond" (Davis, 13) was unusual until the seventeenth century.³⁰

Those who have examined the manuscripts tell us that the letters were written on large sheets of paper, approximately eleven inches across by eighteen inches down. The paper the Pastons used was made in France and was of a type very common in the fifteenth century. When the letter was finished, the paper was torn off at that point, so that a short letter is wider than it is long. It was then folded into a rectangle, a piece of thread was threaded through all the folds and sealed with sealing wax, and on the outside of the letter was the address. Margaret often writes: "To my ryt3 worchypful maystyr Jon Paston be this delyveryd in hast" (Davis, 136).

Of great interest to the student of English is the evidence of

the state of the English language in the fifteenth century as it is presented in The Paston Letters. The Pastons were writing at a time when the language had almost completed the long transition from Old English to Modern English; moreover, they were writing in a dialect very close to that of London which was emerging as the standard language of the court and of educated people. Since the letters represent three generations (John III's son left only one short letter), many changes can be seen in the sixty-odd years they cover, but most remarkable is the fact that Justice William wrote in the standard London dialect while his son and wife — and their sons at first — wrote in a far more conservative, provincial manner. It was not until some forty years after the Judge's letters that his grandsons caught up to him.

While the West Saxon Koiné had the advantage of providing a common language for all writers in Late Old English, it had long since ceased to represent the sounds of the changing spoken language. With the break-up of the West Saxon kingdom after the Conquest, each dialect enjoyed an equal if debased status in England, and each writer attempted to reproduce the sound of his dialect in his written work with the result that there is an astonishing variety in orthography, phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary.

The writing of English prose continued, uninterrupted by the Conquest, right through the Middle English period, but the Conquest, in introducing Norman-French as the language of the ruling classes, brought about an influence which can be seen in The Paston Letters in forms and words which have not survived into modern times. Justice

William, who wrote in French, shows more French influence in his English writings than his descendants. In his own hand, he makes the preceding adjective agree in number with its noun: certains processes (Davis, 3), and he does not alter his clerk's certains notables and resonables causes (Davis, 6). He uses the French participial form in touchant, French vocabulary in most chier man and French spelling in matier. While in William's very few letters the French influence looms large, it can be found elsewhere in the Letters. Margaret has plawnchere for "floor", Agnes' son must do his devere, and John II dates a letter Feverere.

The dropping of initial h and the addition of a superfluous h before initial vowels is so familiar in substandard English in Britain that English language historians do not appear to regard it as a French influence, but anyone who has attempted to teach English to speakers of French immediately recognizes it as such. That it did not intrude into Old English, but appears only after the Conquest supports this premise. Throughout The Paston Letters, it is a common phenomenon. John Jermingham signs himself yowre owne umble servant, while Margaret's amanuensis, no doubt reproducing her dictated speech, writes I ham (am) an hend (end) and that of Margery Brews writes were husyd (used).

ORTHOGRAPHY

One of the difficulties with which writers of Middle English struggled was representing English sounds with French or Latin symbols to replace the runes and other forms peculiar to Old English. By the

fifteenth century, the digraph æ (ash) was no longer in use, nor were the runes, ƿ (wen) and ð (eth). However, þ (thorn) and ȝ (yoch) had survived, although, during the course of the sixty years covered by The Paston Letters, these too were being replaced by Latin letters.

Justice William's autograph letters show that he used þ initially in short words such as þe, þat (usually þ^t) þis, þese, þan, þer, although he also occasionally wrote there and ther. In longer words and medially, he used th: thank, sithen, other,³¹ thus showing a modern tendency not followed by a scribe who wrote many of Margaret's letters between the years 1448 and 1454, who used noper, oper, penk, although he also has thyngys and sythyn. Of the third generation writers, John II and William III prefer þ for þe and þat but rarely use it otherwise; John III's use of þ is rare after 1473; Walter uses þ only in þe but his þ is in the form of a y, thus following a trend indicated by Margaret's 1448-1454 scribe.³² William IV, John III's son, also uses þ in the form of y in his single letter.

The change from þ to th is straightforward compared to the agonies of replacing ȝ (yoch). Justice William, in adherence to the standard London dialect, nowhere uses ȝ for the initial semi-vowel [j] in ye, yet, yede, for which he regularly has y. The ȝ in ȝow persisted in the letters of Agnes, Margaret, occasionally in the letters of William III and regularly in those of Edmond II, but John II and John III always use y. The effort to represent the Old English voiceless spirant [X] before t resulted in much ingenuity and variety. For this sound, Justice William has the modern gh: right, ought. Of the second

generation, Edmond shows -th; John, who often used an amanuensis, shows -gth, -gt, -ght and -th; William and Clement have -th(e) and -t(e). John Jermyngean gives evidence of the greatest mental contortion with dowghther and fawghth (Davis, Clarendon, 21). Of the third generation, John II has left sixty-eight autograph documents while John III has left seventy-one written on his own account and eleven for his mother. John II's first letter in 1461 has rygth, mythg and wrythgtyng (writing) where there is no historical basis for a spirant. In his later letters, -ght becomes regular, including wryght. John III uses -yth or -yt(e) in both his own and his mother's letters until 1467 when -ght appears. After 1468, -ght is unchallenged. Edmond II shows -th(e) or -t(e) until 1472 when the -ght form takes over and William III's change is similar. Thus, with the exception of Walter, whose few letters show a variety of spellings, the third generation eventually reach the form their grandfather had used forty or fifty years before.³³

To replace the Old English initial spirant sc̣[ʃ], Justice William uses the modern sh: shal, shuld. John I in an autograph letter uses sh consistently: shame, shuld; William II has sch: schere (shire), schall: and Clement has Xall, Xwld(e). A scribe used by Agnes shows ch in this position: che (she), achamyd. John II, John III and Edmond II have sch regularly until the mid-seventies when they adopt sh, but William III and Walter retain the conservative spellings, the former using sch and the latter X like his Uncle Clement.

The Old English initial hw required some thought and attempts to reproduce it with the French gu resulted in a wide variety of spellings

among the second and third generation Pastons. Again, Justice William's spelling is modern. There is one example of wych among his letters and one of whou (how)³⁴ but apart from these, wh is regular. John I imitates his father in using wh, but other writers of the second generation show qw: qwat, qweche, qwen, and qh: ghan, ghyche, ghat. Both qw and qh were widespread in northerly areas and were found as far south as Norfolk.³⁵ John II and John III regularly use wh, Edmond and William both use wh or only w but Walter, besides having wych, has Powlys Qwharfe, qwhyche and hoo (who).³⁶

In orthography, as we have seen, Justice William adopted the practice of good writers of the London dialect which was emerging as Standard Modern English. His sons and grandsons were far more conservative although the later letters of his grandsons show that those who were familiar with London and moved about in court circles were more advanced in their spelling habits than the scholars at Eton and Oxford.

PHONOLOGY

Phonetically, the letters show a general lowering of short i to e. Apart from writing "third" as thredde which Davis feels is the influence of the cardinal "three", Justice William's writing is free from this perhaps regional phenomenon. His sons all prefer e to i: trenyte, heder (hither), wretyn except Clement who usually has y in such positions. The third generation all use e rather than i or y, showing that they were "farther from the central stream of development of English than he (Justice William) had been".³⁷

There are two words, mastres and massanger which occur with regularity in The Paston Letters, and which may suggest a further lowering of short i[I] and e[ɛ] to short a[æ]. Of course, mastres may be an attempt to make a feminine noun directly from the masculine mastre without any alteration of the first vowel, but in the case of massanger, I can find no explanation other than a local lowering of the e[ɛ] to a[æ]; neither Davis nor Wyld makes any mention of either of these words.

Superfluous h initially before vowels and the dropping of initial h, I have mentioned in connection with the French influence found in the Letters.³⁷

MORPHOLOGY

A further proof of Justice William's awareness of the blossoming standard English of London is his use of -es as the regular genitive and plural endings of nouns. John I and Margaret's scribes use -is and -ys when they do not abbreviate the ending. William II and Clement both use -ys, even in menys. The third generation all use both -ys and -s. Although they never attain William I's regularity in using the -es, there are signs that they are moving in that direction.

Just as William I's use of þ is conservative, his use of the oblique cases of the third person plural pronouns is equally conservative. In his five autograph letters he has only here and hem, never their or them. John I uses her and hem consistently until 1460, after which their and them occur occasionally and inconsistently. In 1461,

he has whyche of them, and in 1464 he has for the sustentacion of hem and to hold to them in the same letter. Yet, in two letters of 1465, he uses only hem. John's use of hem seems to bear out Wyld's statement that "the history of hem is rather curious".³⁸ Wyld says that after the first quarter of the fifteenth century hem survives in constant use, often alongside the th- form, and he shows that Hoccleve and Lydgate in 1420 used hem in the oblique cases, Malory in 1469 used them in the accusative and hem in the dative and Caxton in 1471 used both forms in the accusative and them in the dative.³⁹ The Pastons' use of hem and them shows no distinction between the accusative and dative forms, and it is possibly for this reason that Norman Davis does not differentiate between the two forms when writing about them.⁴⁰ William II was in London at about 1460 and their becomes commoner than here in his letters after this date although he seems to have preferred hem to them. The third generation shows overwhelming evidence of the preference for them and ther(e). John II shows perhaps only three cases of hem⁴¹ and, although John III seems to prefer hem and occasionally has her, his letters show the movement towards the th- forms.

The second person ye in the nominative and yow in the accusative and dative is regular until the third generation when the otherwise conservative younger brothers use yow in the nominative. William III only uses it once and is not very sure of himself: "as for hyr bewtē, juge yow that when 3e see hyr" (Davis, 407). Walter uses it eight times against five cases of ye and seems equally ambivalent: "and yf yow com to Oxon. ye schal see the letter" (Davis, 404).

The use of 'thou' in The Paston Letters "always implies anger, contempt, or hostility."⁴² When Margaret describes a contretemps in the street between Sir James Gloys and one Wymondham, she quotes Gloys as saying, "Couere thy heed," and he adds, "So I shall for the." Wymondham then retorts, "Shalt þow so, knave?" (Davis, 129). John III quotes a similar argument between himself and Gloys: "We fyll owght befor my modyr wyth 'Thow prowde prest' and 'Thow prowde sqwyer'" (Davis, 353).

Among The Cely Papers, however, the elder Richard Cely, writing in 1473, uses thee in the oblique cases when he addresses his son, although ye appears in the nominative: "I grete the wyll etc." (C.P., 9). but from 1479 to his death in 1481 or 1482, he uses only ye and you: "I grete you wyll and ye schall understand..." (C.P., 18). Wyld points out that Davie (1307-27) uses þee and 3ee to our Lord while he uses 3ou to Edward II, and the Angel addresses Davie with þou and þee.⁴³ His observation concerning Davie conforms with what is found in The Book of Margery Kempe, written before 1438, in which the woman uses thou in addressing God and "blessed Jesu" and is addressed in turn as thou by Christ and a monk, but she and her husband address each other as ye and you.⁴⁴ The use of thou and ye is not so consistent in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, a late fourteenth century poem written in the dialect of the northwest Midlands,⁴⁵ but it does to some extent conform to the use in The Paston Letters. In Sir Gawain, 3e and yow are generally used in addressing a socially superior person, but when the Green Knight

first addresses King Arthur, he roughly uses pou and pe, whereupon Arthur and Gawain retort with the same forms. At the Green Chapel, the Green Knight begins with pou, changes to 3e as his attitude changes and reverts to pou. Gawain follows with 3e but uses pou as well. "Though the general lines are clear, there is some inconsistency,"⁴⁶ say the editors of *Sir Gawain* who feel that there are such variations in the use of pou and 3e in the poem that "too much cannot be made of the lady's occasional pou to Gawain or Gawain's response."⁴⁷ They point out that in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, which depicts a comparable level of society, the plural was normal even between lovers.⁴⁸

Another form that is introduced to *The Paston Letters* during the third generation of writers is the -s ending of the third person singular in the present tense. It is first used by John II when writing to John III between 1472 and 1474, but he uses it only five times against the much commoner -yth in the rest of his letters.⁴⁹ John III uses it fifteen times in all. Edmond never uses -s in his mother's letters and it only appears in his own in 1471 after he had lived for a time in London.⁵⁰ The younger brothers appear to be consistently conservative in this respect, for the -s ending never appears in their letters.

The final form to be considered is the -n ending of the present indicative plural, the past indicative and subjunctive plural, the infinitive and the past participle of strong verbs. The movement in the fifteenth century, and exemplified in *The Paston Letters*, is away from the -n ending in the first three categories and towards the -n ending in the past participle. As we have come to expect, Justice

William's writing is modern in this respect. His five letters show two infinitives in -n and thirty-eight without, eight plural verbs with -n against sixteen without, but ten past participles with -n against two without.⁵¹

Of the second generation writers, John I has only one past participle with -n and twenty-eight without, Edmond has one with and four without, but William II and Clement are more modern; William uses no infinitives with -n, only five plural verbs with -n, and nineteen past participles with -n against eighteen without. His past participles with -n become more frequent after his 1459-60 visit to London. Clement's six letters have no -n forms in the infinitive or in the past plurals, four in the present plural (three of them are ben) but twenty-one past participles with -n to ten without.⁵²

As usual, the third generation is closer to their grandfather. John II has no -n forms in the infinitive or past plural, ben six times and seyn once, and his past participles with -n number 330 against thirty-two without, a ratio of ten to one. With the exception of comen, those without -n end in a nasal or -nd: wonne, bonde.⁵³ In the letters that John III wrote for Margaret, mostly between 1460 and 1462, -n appears once in the present plural, ben, and once in the past plural, redyn; in the past participle, less than one-third of the nearly seventy cases have -n.

In his own letters, the proportion of -n endings in the past participle after 1473 is 8.7 to one without and after 1475 it is eleven to one. Edmond has a few -n forms in the first three categories and

twenty-four -n forms of the past participle to two without. William's record is similar, but in his few letters Walter has wretyn three times and has three past participles without -n.⁵⁴

SYNTAX

Syntactically, the language of the Pastons differs little from Modern English. The relative pronoun þat is used with both things and persons in restrictive clauses as it is today. Modern word-order, necessitated by the loss of most Old English case-endings, has become well established, and prepositions are used with ease. Compound tenses are also well established, the present and past perfect tenses being commonly used in the letters with have or had written in full, although John I gives an instance of hat entrid (Davis, 73). The Pastons also have complete command of the past conditional, but in this case sometimes write a or an for have. John II writes: he hadde felte and ye have done but ye and Howard schuld a streuyn to-gyddre (Davis, 231), and Margaret has: They wolde an had here wyl parformyd (Davis, 203). Wyld notes that the loss of initial h can be seen in the auxiliary have in writings of the Middle English period, but makes no specific reference to The Paston Letters, nor does he remark on the loss of the -ve of have.⁵⁵ Davis cites similar examples to those above but merely notes that a and an are reduced forms of have in compound tenses.⁵⁶ It seems that the auxiliary was as unstressed as it is today and that the Pastons and their scribes wrote as they spoke.

The periphrastic present continuous, which was only fully

developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,⁵⁷ is used by William III: "Sche is not a-bydynghe ther sche ys now" (Davis, 407).

The verb to do was not used as an auxiliary to express the question and negative forms of the simple present and preterite tenses as it is now as this, too, was a much later development, but it was used to express cause. Justice William writes: "I haue... doon dwely examyned þe jnstrument" (Davis, 4); his wife writes; "I prey yow do byen for me ij pypys of gold" (Davis, 13), and Margaret, reminding her husband of a "gyrdyl" says "I pre yow... þat ye wyl weche-safe to do mak yt" (Davis, 125).

Caxton complained in 1490, "And certaynly our langage now vsed varyeth ferre from that whiche was vsed and spoken whan I was borne."⁵⁸ His dates (1422-1491) roughly coincide with the greater part of The Paston Letters, and it can be seen from the Letters that, although individual writers could choose from many variations, there was a general direction in the changes which took place. That direction was always toward the future literary language -- not that of Eton and Oxford, but that of London and the court. It was the writers who had the greatest knowledge of the capital and of the King's household whose English is most modern. The exception is John I; he may, however, have been such a stiff-necked individual that he persisted in his conservative style out of sheer stubbornness. On the other hand, John wrote few of his letters himself; even in prison he was able to obtain an amanuensis, and it is quite possible that scribes tended to be conservative in spelling and syntax.

VOCABULARY

Besides the very important influence of London and the court on the language of The Paston Letters, there are one or two other influences at play which affect the vocabulary of the Letters. The first and second generations were well versed in the law while three members of the third were soldiers. As John Paston's wife, Margaret acquired a familiarity with legal terms almost equal to his; therefore, in her letters, she uses with apparent ease such words as replevyn, dystreyn, in dentur, indytementes, and such phrases as suffycyant suerty, beryth hym a hand, noyr in terminer 'oyer and terminer'. She even handles the Latin terms, supersedias and supplicavit with sangfroid. Other writers represented in The Paston Letters use amercyid, en enquerre de jure patronatus, testymonyall and, of course, John I writes easily of corte rolles, a ded of feffement, and a letter of atorne.

Before the three Paston sons became soldiers, they had already seen battle in the violence that attended the keeping of Gresham, Drayton and Caister, violence which their father had referred to as "war". Margaret, as "capteneesse", knew the value of such things as crosse bowis, wyndacys, and quarell; as polle-axis, byllys and jakkys; she knew all about the baly, the constabyll and a garyson. She knew that when John II was to attend the King at Leicester, he was to go defensebylly arayid and John III writes of a newe comission and warnyng which requires hyryng of harneys and a man to attend the King with his spere and bowes.

Words with a local flavour used more particularly by the Pastons

who stayed at home are Margaret's lwmysch 'malicious', crod 'wheeled', brethel 'good for nothing', swemeful 'grievous', plawncher 'floor', qwethword 'last will', and reder 'thatcher'.⁵⁹ Two peculiar forms are werd 'world' and elmye or elmyse 'enemies'.⁶⁰

The Paston Letters are interesting in that they provide the first written record of some words and phrases and the last recorded use of one phrase. Justice William provided the first recorded use of 'new-laid' as applied to eggs, William II has the first quotations of jantyllmanly and a folis paradyce, John I has in hoder-moder 'secretly' and Margaret has hert-brennyng, captenesse, doggebold 'a human tool', and schyttyl-wytttyd.⁶¹ The earliest reference to card-playing in England is found in one of Margaret's letters (Davis, 153),⁶² John II is the first to use what-calle-ye-hym⁶³ and he anticipates the first OED quotations of Nowe ore neuer (Davis, 292), he played the fool (Davis, 282), to daunce atendaunce (Davis, 291), he harpyd and he ledde vss a dawnce (Davis, 301),⁶⁴ and three of John III's expressions, by hummys and by hays,⁶⁵ I eete lyek an horse, and to eete yow owte at the dorys (Davis, 332)⁶⁶ are recorded for the first time in The Paston Letters.

Margaret's use of rape rewith (Davis, 220) which she uses in 1473, and once previously in 1469, is the last known occurrence of the expression which had been in use since circa 1300.⁶⁷

Besides such picturesque colloquialisms as the above, the Pastons unconsciously enriched their letters with homely proverbs, those truths which remain constant throughout the centuries. Agnes quotes, 'In lityl

bysynes lyeth myche reste' (Davis, 30); John I has see hem seld thei
shall sone be forgete (Davis, 77); John III has fer fro jee, fer fro
hert (Davis, 355); John II, grettest clerkys are nott alweye wysest
 (Davis, 296), while Margaret writes in anguish, We bette be busschysse
... and othere men haue be byrdys (Davis, 216). But perhaps the most
 endearing phrases are those which express so poignantly the writers'
 own feelings, such as John III's despair in myn empty hed wyll not let
me remember it (Davis, 383) and Margaret's grief over the loss of
 Caister, the fayere-este flowere of owr garlond (Davis, 216). From the
 competent, business-like, prosaic Margaret this is poetry indeed.

CHAPTER III

"I sende yow gode tydynggys of þe comyng and þe brynggyn hoom of þe gentylwomman þat ye wetyn of fro Redham þis same nyght, acordyng to poyntment þat ye made þer-for yowre-self" (Davis, 13).

With these words to her husband, Agnes Paston introduces Margaret of Mautby who has come to Paston to meet Justice William's eldest son and heir, John. The meeting was obviously a success for Agnes' pleasure and approval are clearly seen as she continues, "And as for þe furst aqweyntaunce be-tween John Paston and þe seyde gentilwomman, she made hym gentil chere in gyntyl wyse and seyde he was verrayly yowre son" (Davis, 13). Knowing what was expected of her, Margaret tactfully said the correct thing, for how better could she please her future mother-in-law than by remarking on the likeness between her husband-to-be and the "Good Judge"?

Margaret seems to have willingly married a young man she had never even seen before — perhaps it was love at first sight or perhaps she was so imbued with a sense of duty that she never questioned the arrangements that had been made on her behalf. There is no hint in any of her letters that she ever had any regrets; on the contrary, she seems to have embraced the Paston family and its fortunes wholeheartedly until the last few years before her death when, ill and disillusioned, she finally returned to Mautby.

While three of her earliest letters to John I start with a more humble greeting than she was ever to use again, "Ryth reuerent and worsepful husbon" (Davis, 124), her awe of her student husband is soon dissipated and she is able to write in a relaxed, familiar way about the things which concern her most closely: she has only two gowns, one of which "ys so comerus þat I ham wery to wer yt" and she needs a new girdle "for I ham waxse so fetys þat I may not be gyrte in no barre of no gyrdyl þat I have but of on." Her delightfully rueful comment, "Ye haue lefte me sweche a rememrav[n]ce þat makyth me to thynke vppe-on yow bothe day and nyth wanne I wold sclepe" (Davis, 125), explains the need for new clothes.

Another very personal touch is seen in her ending to a letter dated either 1449 (Gairdner) or 1454 (Davis): "Be youre gronyng wyff" (Davis, 151). Her request in the same letter that the expected child "be named Herry in remembrans of your brother Herry" tells us that Margaret is going about her husband's business and her own despite the mountainous encumbrance of the last stages of pregnancy, yet her sense of fun and her certainty of John's sympathy are undiminished.

A fuller indication of Margaret's love for her husband is seen when he was sick in London two or three years after their marriage. She writes, "I had neuer so hevy a sesyn as I had fro þe tyme þat I woste of your sekenesse tyl I woste of your a-mendynge, and 3yth myn hert is in no grete esse, ne nowth xal be tyl I wott þat 3e ben very hol." She assures him that if "I mythe have hade my wylle I xulde a seyne yow er dys tyme" (Davis, 126). Her impatience to have him safely

at home is tempered only by her consideration of his comfort and convenience.

Margaret's letters to her husband express her anxiety for his safety for, after the violence at Gresham, there were men threatening his life. She has heard that, "þow 3e ben at London 3e xul ben met wyth there as wele as þow 3e were her; and þer-for I pray 3ou hertyly be ware hw 3e walk þere and haue a gode felaschep wyth 3ou qhan 3e xul walk owt³" (Davis, 131). Again in 1461, she warns him, "be ware howe ye ryd or go, for nowgty and euyll desposyd felachepys" (Davis, 160). Likewise, she warns him of doctors: "Also, fore Goddys sake be ware what medesynys ye take of any fysissyanyys of London. I schal neuer trust to hem be-cause of yowre fadre and myn onkyl, whoys sowlys God assoyle" (Davis, 177).

John paston was an exacting husband whom Margaret was always anxious to please, and her letters show how carefully she carried out his instructions: "I have shewyd Richard Calle your writyng and told hym your entent Also I have do your erandys to my moder and to my cosyn Clere after your writyng" (Davis, 172). Even when she feels that he has spent too much money on her entertainment when she visits him in the Fleet, it is his wishes that are important: "Ye dede more coste thanne myn wylle was that ye choulde do, but ... God gyf me grase to do that may plese yow" (Davis, 192). Feeling unable to keep up with his demands, she once writes, "I wolde fayn doo well yf I cowde, and as I canne I wol doo to youre pleasure and profet, and in such thyngys as I cannot skyle of I wyll take avyse of such as I know that be youre frendys, and doo as well as I canne" (Davis, 184).

However, when she has failed in some small matter, as a woman of Margaret's calibre seldom did, her apology is overwhelmingly humble: "Be my trowth it is not my will noþer to do ne sey that shuld cawse yow for to be displeasid, and if I haue do I am sory þer-of and will amend itt; wherefore I beseche yow to forgeve me and þat ye bere none hevynesse in yowr hert ayens me, for yowr displeasans shuld be to hevy to me to indure wyth" (Davis, 148).

Even though Margaret is careful to ask John to "sende me word how I schal do in this matre and in all other" (Davis, 189), she does not hesitate to tell him where his duty lies. Of a man whose goodwill is valuable, she writes, "I pray you lete hym be thankyd therfore, and that shall cause hym to be the betere wyllid" (Davis, 185); moreover, when John is released from prison in 1461, she tells him, "Ye are ryth myche bownde to thank God, and all tho þat loue yow.... Ye ar myche behold to the meyir and to Gylberd, and to dyuers othyr of þe aldyrmen" (Davis, 163).

Throughout the Letters, Margaret can never hear from her husband frequently enough. Although she is sometimes anxious for a reply to guide her in her actions, more often she simply wants to have a word from the man she loves: "I pray yow þat ye be not strange of wryting of letterys to me be-twix þis and þat ye come hom; if I myght I wold haue euery day on from yow" (Davis, 150). At another time, she says, "it was to me gret comfort to her fro yow" (Davis, 165), and even after twenty-five years of marriage she writes, "I thynk ryght long to hyre tydyngys tyll I haue t[y]dyngys from you" (Davis, 181). Better still

than a letter from her husband would be his presence at home and Margaret voices this fervent wish more than once: "but I troste to God þat ye schall be at home yowyr-selfe in hast" (Davis, 167).

I think, then, that there is sufficient evidence in the Letters to show that Margaret had a deep and abiding love for her husband, that she took pleasure in his letters and in his presence at home, and that she was proud of the respect that he commanded not only in his professional life but also in his personal life.

As might be expected from letters which were written primarily for business purposes, there is little mention of the Paston children until they too become part of that business. Margaret's oldest sons enter the scene when they begin to help or hinder family affairs; the younger boys write of their expenses at school while the daughters are most often spoken of in connection with their marriages which were always looked upon as essentially business matters.

While Margaret can refer with affection and perhaps a little pride to a "fayre dowgter" (Davis, 140) in 1451, her attitude has changed by 1469, when, like her mother-in-law, she does not seem to have been able to tolerate the presence of her daughters at home. Of Margery she writes to John II, "I wuld ye shuld purvey for your suster to be wyth my lady of Oxford or wyth my lady of Bedford... for we be eythere of vs wery of othere" (Davis, 201), and if Anne returns home, "she shall oftyn tymes meve me and put me in gret inquietenesse" (Davis, 206). Although Margaret is perfectly willing to consider a match for one of her daughters on monetary terms: "my moder thynkyth

pat it shuld be get for lesse mony nowe... than it shuld be her-after" (Davis, 174), her attitude towards Margery's love match with Richard Calle combines sorrow and anger. When Margery assures the Bishop of Norwich that if her original words to Calle were not sufficiently binding, "sche wold make yt suerhere ore þan sche went thens...,Thes leud worddys gereue me and here grandam as myche as alle þe remnawnte." Margaret is so angry that "I schargyd my seruantys þat sche xuld not be reseyued in myn hows," and she concludes, "we haue lost of here but a brethele, and... sche xuld neuere be at myn hart as sche was" (Davis, 203).

While Margaret has little patience with her daughters, she displays more sympathy with at least two of her sons, John II and Walter. Although John I refers to his eldest son as "a drane amonges bees" (Davis, 72), Margaret praises him whenever she can: "Yovr svnne dede hese heyrne ryght wele" (Davis, 153), and she takes his part when John I turns him out of the house. However, she reproaches him for the awkward position he has put her in: "I late yow wett I was ryght euyll payed wyth yow. Your fader thowght, and thynkyth yet, þat I was asentyd to your departyng, and that hathe causyd me to have gret hevinesse" (Davis, 175). Torn between love for her stern husband and for her charming but impractical first-born, Margaret's lot was not a happy one.

She soon finds, however, that charm and courtly manners are not the qualities needed by the heir to the Paston estates and, after his father's death, she urges John, "spede youre maters soo thys terme that we may be in rest hereafter" (Davis, 198). Her patience grows

thin when John III is defending Caister with no help from John II: "but thei haue hasty help, thei be like to lese bothe there lyfes and the place, to the grettest rebuke to you that euer came to any jentilman" and she finds that she must resort to sternness: "Do your devour now, and lete me send yow nomore massangeres for this materes" (Davis, 204). She has such grave doubts about his ability to manage property that "I thynke veryly þat ye wulde be dysposyd here-aftyr to selle or sette to morgage þe lond þat ye xulde haue after me, yowyr modyr, as gladdly and rathyr þan þat lyfelood þat ye haue after yowyr fadyr." Perhaps in order to force him to take his responsibilities more seriously, she declares that she will no longer provide for William: "Hys boord and hys scole hyer ys owying... and he hathe greet nede of gownys and odyr gere... I wulde 3e xulde reme[m]bryt and purvey þere-fore; as for me, I wul nat" (David, 227). Always short of money, John borrows from his mother who in turn is forced to borrow from Elizabeth Clere, much to Margaret's embarrassment and grief "remembereng wat we haue had before thys, and ho symppylly yt hath be spente" (Davis, 212).

Although John II continues on his carefree way all his life, pawning the family plate, selling his woods and even mortgaging the manor of Sporle, at which Margaret "wepyth and takyth on meruaylously" (Davis, 355), she always welcomes him home. Before he has succeeded in redeeming Sporle, he has occasion to thank her "off yowre good moderhood, kyndenesse, cheere, charge, and coste whyche I had and pvtte yow to att my last beyng wyth yow, wh[y]che God gyffe me grace her-afftre to deserve" (Davis, 284). Although he brings her to the

depths of despair over his failure to build a tomb for his father, the neglect of which is the talk of the country, her letter containing her reproaches on this account continues with affectionate advice about a possible marriage to a kinswoman of the Queen. Such a marriage would effect an end to their troubles but if John cannot love the woman "so þat sche be suche on as 3e can thynke to haue jssv by... I had rather þat 3e neuer maryd" (Davis, 228).

When the plain facts are in the Letters for all to read, it is difficult to understand why Margaret should have continued to forgive and cherish her eldest son when it was John III who had the qualities most needed to protect the family holdings from the attacks and inroads which all too many people were trying to make on them. He was practical and level-headed, he had a wit and a sense of irony as when he retorts to John II, "I crye yow mercy þat I was so lewde to encomber yow wyth eny so sympyll a mater, consyderyng the grette maters and weyghty þat ye haue to doo" (Davis, 332), and his letters to his mother show a kindly thoughtfulness. It is John III who defends Caister, it is he who prevents a court from being held at Saxthorp by one who claimed it by sitting next to the steward and blotting "hys book wyth my fyngyr as he wrot" (Davis, 338), it is he who collects rents and gathers the proceeds from the farms; yet, though Margaret could confide in him, she seems to have taken him for granted. Indeed, she even condones Gloys' behaviour, for John III writes that the priest "is euyr choppyng at me when my modyr is present, wyth syche wordys as he thynkys wrathe me and also cause my modyr to be dyspleased wyth me" (Davis, 355).

His unhappiness is shared by Edmond II for John says, "We go not to bed vnchedyn lyghtly. All þat we do is ille doon, and all that Syr Jamys and Pekok dothe is well doon" (Davis, 353). When he married Margery Brews, however, Margaret relented enough to give him the manor of Sparham, but she hurt him to the quick in her last years when she spoke more openly to his wife than to him. He protests, "Modyr, savyng your plesure, ther nedyth non enbasatours nor meanys betwyx yow and me, for ther is neyther wyff nor other frend shall make me to do that that your comandment shall make me to do, jf I may have knowlage of it" (Davis, 386). Perhaps John III, feeling himself outshone by his courtly elder brother, tried too hard; perhaps the humility, quite foreign to John II, which shows in his letters was displeasing to Margaret, or perhaps the efficient John III was too much like his efficient mother. It is interesting, though, that he was a favourite of the younger boys. William's letters to him are evidence of his affection, and, when Walter asks to be recommended to everyone at home, he singles out John III: "and specyaly to my brodyre John þe yonger" (Davis, 402).

Edmond II is the son who makes the least impression on the reader and, I suspect, made the least on Margaret. He wrote six of his mother's letters for her between 1469 and 1472, but in the latter year was suffering under Gloys' tyranny to such an extent that John III urges John II to "puruey for my brodyr E. to go ouer wyth yow, or he is on-don", adding that their mother "wyl nowthyr geue nor lend non of you bothe a peny forward" (Davis, 353). Edmond's only letter to

Margaret gives a clue to her lack of sympathy for him, for he is over-humble and tiresome in his niggling attention to detail.

Quite different is her attitude to Walter of whom she writes, "I were loth to lese hym; for I trust to haue more joye of hym þan I haue of them þat bene owlder." As long as Walter learns well and behaves himself at Oxford, "þer shall nothyng fayll hym þat I may helpe with" (Davis, 220). Although the better part of his only letter to his mother reports his expenses, it is that of a warm-hearted boy, secure in the knowledge of his mother's love for him.

There is no letter from William to his mother to indicate what his feelings towards her were and her request that John II undertake William's expenses is a reflection on John rather than on William. She saw to it, however, that he received a classical education, and he seems to have been an out-going, uninhibited lad untormented by an inferiority complex.

Judging from the Letters, Margaret seems to have treated her children in a variety of ways. Her attitude towards her daughters was not unnatural in the fifteenth century and is not so much a deficiency in Margaret as a characteristic of a medieval parent. However, her overt preference for John II and Walter shows how blind a mother's love can be. John III and Edmond were the sons who served her best; they are the ones one would expect her to appreciate most, but, even after the deaths of John II and Walter, Margaret remained cool. The unhappiness of John III and of Edmond and their attempts to please her right up to the time of her death suggest a most unpleasing side of

Margaret Paston. Far from holding her imperfections against her, for I feel that a paragon of perfect motherhood would be a very uninteresting person, I feel that her quirks and foibles render her a fascinating woman.

Margaret's shrewdness appears early in her letters for in 1449 she advises John to get "som crosse bowis, and wyndacis to bynd þem wyth, and quarell" which are necessary because "3wr hwsis here ben so low þat þere may non man schete owt wyth no long bowe" (Davis, 130). When she hears of "a fayre plase to sell in Seynt Laveransis parysch" she supposes John shall have it "als gode chepe or bettere than anoper shuld" (Davis, 140) since the owner has been disappointed once in default of payment. Her business acumen assumes a slightly ghoulish cast, however, when she tells John that "Ser Herry Inglose is passyd to God this nygth" and, before the poor man is in his grave, says, "If ye desyer to bey any of hys stuff I pray you send me word þer-of in hast" (Davis, 141). However, fifteenth-century men and women, living close to death by plague, lawlessness or war, had no false delicacies about death: if the Pastons did not buy the best of Sir Harry's belongings, someone else would. She has a shrewd suggestion to make in 1465, which benefits tenant and landlord alike. The tenantries at Mautby are in need of repair but "þe tenauntys be so pore that they are not a power to repare hem; wherfor yf [it] leke you I wold that þe marche þat Bryge had myght be kept in your owne hand þis yer, that þe tenauntys myght have ruschys to repare wyth her howsys" (Davis, 178). She adds that there is also windfall wood of no great value at the

manor that could be put at their disposal.

The mother of a large family and the mistress of large households would need to be well endowed with a sound managerial sense if her family were to survive. When she was forced out of Gresham, there were twelve people in the house with her, all of whom had to be fed and clothed; moreover, John II allows us to appreciate the complexity and size of just one of the manor houses for which Margaret had to provide when he mentions walls, towers, a moat and a bridge in connection with Gresham (Davis, 264). His sketch, reproduced in Gairdner's edition (Gairdner, 676), shows a quadrangle with four round towers at the corners and a gatehouse in one wall.

In days when stores were not available, food had to be bought at harvest time, preserved, stored and made to last until the next harvest. One year, Margaret had not been able to get fish until late in the season and she tells John I, "As for hering, I haue bowt an horslode for iiij s. vjd.; ...As for bevere, þer is promysid me somme, but I myt not gete it yett" (Davis, 148). Richard Calle once writes that he has arranged for sufficient beef to be laid in to last until Lent (Gairdner, 425). In addition to staples that could be obtained locally, some products had to be bought in London, so Margaret asks John I "to send me an oper sugowr loff, for my old is do" (Davis, 142). Over the years, Margaret had to make many requests of her husband and sons for necessities that were not available in Norwich but she was never extravagant although her husband perhaps did not appreciate her forbearance when asked for "swech lacys os I send yow exsaunpyll of

in þ[i]s letter" or when he was told that the caps he had bought for his sons "be to lytyl for hem. I pray yow bey hem feynere cappys and largere þan þo were" (Davis, 127).

Her shrewdness stood her in good stead during John I's many and often prolonged absences when she had to make decisions and take action without being able to consult him. Early in their married life, she had assumed the task of keeping him informed: "If I here any straw[n]ge tygyngys in þis contré, I xall send 3w wurd" (Davis, 128). In order to do this, she herself needed a sound knowledge of the practical and legal aspects of protecting and maintaining the Paston holdings. From understanding a situation it is only a step to personal involvement and for many years Margaret re-let farms, oversaw the gathering of rents and interviewed a succession of people who wished to obtain John's legal services.

But the greatest demands on her ability and fortitude were occasioned by the Duke of Suffolk's threats to Drayton and Hellesdon. When the plough-horses of two of the Hellesdon tenants were seized by the Duke's bailiff, Margaret seized seventy-seven head of "nete" at Drayton to ensure that the tenants pay their rent to her and not to the Duke. Unfortunately, a "replevin" from the sheriff of Norwich forced her to return the cattle. But Margaret enjoyed a signal triumph when she decided to hold a court at Drayton in order to strengthen the Pastons' claim. Only two of her men volunteered, Thomas Bond and Sir James Gloys. They were met by sixty of the Duke's men who promptly arrested Bond, but before the judges went to the shirehouse the next

morning, Margaret intercepted them "and enformed hem of such ryottes and assaughthis... and after the juges vndrestod the trouthe he gaue the baly of Cossey be-for me and many other a passyng gret rebuke" (Davis, 189). She is so gratified and excited that in her letter to John I she repeats the story twice over. When Hellesdon was sacked, Margaret went to see the destruction and to comfort the tenants as well as she could, "and in gode feyth there wyll no cryature thynke how fowle and orubelly it ys a-rayed." The situation is so desperate that "we kype here dayly more then xxx persons for sauacyon of ous and the place" (Davis, 196).

Under John II's inept handling of the family fortunes, Margaret's business ability must have seemed more a curse than a blessing for her understanding brought nothing but despair: "We bette þe busschysse, and haue þe losse and þe dy[s]worschuppe, and othere men haue þe brydys" (Davis, 216). In an attempt to prevent John II from selling his lands, she says "she wyll put fro yow dobyll as myche lond as ye selle" (Davis, 341); moreover, when she needs the money she has lent him in order to repay Elizabeth Clere, she has John III tell him that she will have to sell her woods and "that shall disawayll hym better than cc marc. yf I dey, and yf I shwld sell them now there wold non man geue for hem so mych by nere an c marc. as they be worth by-cause there be so many woodsalis in Norfolke at thys tym" (Davis, 209B). Her last letter, written in 1478, shows that she still has a firm grasp of business affairs for, concerning John II's claim to Drayton and Hellesdon, she fears that he may regret "þat 3e be-gan your

cleyme wyth-owte þat 3e haue take suche a suyr wey as may be to your intent" (Davis, 228).

While going about her husband's business and later that of John II, Margaret was in close contact with many people, but it is quite natural that visits to her relatives and to friends of her own rank gave her the most pleasure. Since such occasions rarely involved business, mention of them is casual; however, Margaret speaks of calling on Agnes while shopping in Norwich and of seeing Elizabeth Clere, while John of Damme, James Gresham and others were all her guests at one time or another. She felt honoured when "the meyr and the meyires sent hedyr her dynerys... and they dynyd her" (Davis, 154) and when Hugh of Fenn and his wife visit her she hopes to "make hym gode chyre" (Davis, 190). When Margaret of Anjou was in Norwich, Margaret was one of those present although her pleasure was somewhat marred by having to borrow "my cosyn Elysabet Cleris devys, for I durst not for shame go wyth my bedys among so many fresch jantylywomman as here were at þat tym" (Davis, 146). Even the short journeys that Margaret made to Norwich, to Caister, and from one Paston manor to another could not have been without their pleasurable moments. Of her leisure hours at home, Margaret says nothing, but her report to John I of activities that were allowed at a time of mourning, "non dysgysynggys nere harpyng nere lvtynge nere syngyn, nere non lowde dysportys, but pleyng at the tabyllys and scheese and cardys" (Davis, 153), gives a picture of how leisure time may have been spent. Moreover, there were many books in her home which may have been read aloud

by her sons or by the chaplain.

In a happy combination of religious devotion and pleasure, Margaret went on at least two pilgrimages and, since there were two famous shrines in Norfolk, probably more. At the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, which ranked second only to that of Sir Thomas à Becket in Canterbury, the sick and infirm could see the sacred Image of Our Lady and the Virgin's milk,¹ while at Bromholme there was the famous Rood composed of a portion of the true cross. When John I was struck down with a "grete dysese", his women folk in Norfolk set to work all the religious forces at their disposal for his "a-mendynge". Margaret writes that her own mother "hat be-hestyd a-nodyr ymmage of wax of þe weytte of yow to Oour Lady of Walsyngham, and sche sent iiij nobelys to þe iiij orderys of frerys at Norweche to pray for yow; and I have be-hestyd to gon on pylgreymmays to Walsyngham and to Sent Levenardys for yow" (Davis 126). While in London, she was urged by John III to visit "þe Rood of Northedor, and Seynt Sauyour at Barmonsey" (Davis, 323), the first of which was said to be the work of Joseph of Arimathea while both it and the rood at Saint Saviour's worked miracles. Still later, in 1481, Margaret planned another pilgrimage to Walsingham for Edmond writes that he will accompany her "as my dute is" (Davis, 399).

In Norfolk, there were 697 livings in 1291² and there is no reason to believe that the number had declined by the fifteenth century; moreover, Norwich was the seat of a bishopric and, made wealthy by the wool trade, had thirty-eight churches, more in proportion to its

population than London.³ Not only was Margaret on friendly terms with the Bishop of Norwich but parish priests were also her friends and advisors. During the fifteenth century, the Pastons were involved in presenting more than twenty different livings in Norfolk.⁴ Margaret herself "lays in the presentacyon of Drayton" (Davis, 190) and when her choice is disputed by the Duke of Suffolk, she reports, "I was thys daye wyth myn lorde of Norwyche at Thorppe, and informed hym of the demenyng of the mater" (Davis, 192). Her suggestion of a replacement for the parson of Mautby gives a clear picture of the relative positions of a village parson and the lord of the manor to whom he owed his living. "I truste verely that ye choulde leke hym ryght well, for he is rit a prystly man and vertusly dysposyd.... And yf he myght havyt he woulde kepe an howsolde þervpon and bylde well þe plase, and þerof have it grete nede for it is now rit evyll reparyd; and I wott well he wold be rulyd and gydyt as ye wyll have hym" (Davis, 192).

At a more intimate level, the Pastons "before time of mind... had licence to have a chaplen and have divine service within them" (Gairdner, 554) and we find Margaret writing to John III from Mautby, "I wold ye shuld spekyn wyth my lord of Norwych and a-say to get a lysten of hym þat I may have þe sacrement her in the chapell" (Davis, 222). Her chaplain, Sir James Gloys, had been with the family at least from the first mention of him in 1448 until his death in 1473.

Sir James seems to have been a cantankerous individual for he was far from reticent in a shouting match with Lord Molyne's men in 1448 which resulted in Margaret's sending him to her husband in London "to attend up-on yow for a seson, for ease of myn owen hert" (Davis,

129); moreover, "the prowde, pevysh and euyl dysposyd prest" (Davis, 353), firmly entrenched in Margaret's favour, seems to have done his utmost to alienate her from her children. It was he who turned Margery away from the house, it was he of whom John III had such bitter complaints, and it was he who encouraged Margaret to refuse money to John II as John III writes, "I can not fynd by hyr þat she wyll depert wyth eny syluys for your costys, for she and hyr cwrte alegge mor pouerté then euer wasse" (Davis, 339), and after Gloys' death, John II warns, "be ware fro hense forthe þat noo suche felawe crepe in be-twyen hyre and yow" (Davis, 282). Yet Margaret was fond of the priest and depended upon him. She writes that if it were not necessary for him to escort Walter to Oxford, "I wald ye myght come to me, thowe ye schuld com opon one day and goo ayane on þe next day — than schuld I comon with you in all materis" (Davis, 220). To offset his quarrelsome, domineering qualities, the chaplain was undoubtedly a courageous man and an able businessman. It took courage to brave the Duke of Suffolk's men at Drayton and his letters to John I attest to his mastery of Paston affairs. A letter of 1451, however, contains a warning of things to come when he begs John I to excuse Margaret's not writing "for myche of the mater that she shuld have wrete to you I had wrete in my letter or she knew ther of; and also she knew not of so redy a massanger as I had" (Gairdner, 146). Just as Richard Calle's ability was valued by the practical Pastons despite his affront of marrying their daughter, so Gloys' value to the family apparently outweighed his short-comings. No doubt, Margaret

found the presence of the strong-minded, dominant priest a comfort after the death of her husband when she was trying to cope with John II's lack of efficiency.

That Margaret's faith was not a superficial matter of habit can be seen in her absolute refusal of John II's tempting suggestion that a divorce be obtained for Margery: "þat xuld offend God and 3owr conschens; fore... God wul take vengawns there-vpon and 3e xuld put 3owr-sylfe and othere in gret joparté" (Davis, 203). She seems to have believed in a personal God who watches His own closely; to John I, she writes, "Trust veryly in God and leve hym and serve hym, and he wyl not deseve 3w" (Davis, 129), and to John II, "God wysythyt 3ow as yt plesythe hym jn sundery wyses. He woold 3e xuld knowe hym and serue hym better þan 3e haue do" (Davis, 205). However, with her usual shrewdness, Margaret had no wish to see Walter take orders too hastily: "for oftyn rape rewith. I will loue hym bettere to be a good seculare man þan to be a lewit prest" (Davis, 220).

Although there is no record of Margaret's funeral, ample evidence of her piety is found in her will, in which she provides for improvements and gifts to six churches. She also leaves gifts of money to the four orders in Norwich and Yarmouth, to the sisters of Normans of Norwich, to the hospital of St. Giles, and to poor men and lepers. Besides her charitable gifts, she requires that twelve poor men "shalbe apparailled in white gownes with hodes according, to holde xij torches abowte myn herse", that the twelve torches will remain in the church for her yearday which will be kept for herself, her husband

and her ancestors for twelve years after her decease. "A taper of wexe of a li." is to burn on her grave "ich Sonday and haliday at all diuine seruice to be seid or sunge in the seid cherch" for seven years, and an honest secular priest is to sing and pray in the aisle for her soul, the souls of her ancestors, her husband and his ancestors (Davis, 230).

Remembering her husband's neglected tomb, she makes provision for and gives explicit directions for her own which shall have "a stoon of marble to be leyde alofte vpon my grave within a yer next after my decesse." The aisle in Mautby church were she is to be buried "byfore the ymage of Our Lady" is to be "newe roved, leded, and glased, and the walles therof heynded conueniently and werkmanly" (Davis, 230).

Margaret Paston was a remarkable woman, a woman who faced unflinchingly the task of bringing up a large family during the troubled reign of Henry VI and the Wars of the Roses, during the years when the plague repeatedly scourged the towns and the countryside. She was a determined woman who, side by side with her husband, braved the enmity of the most powerful nobles of Norfolk and who was a constant source of aid and encouragement to John I. When he died, a light went out of her life for in her letters after his death there is not a vestige of the humour that she shared with him; she became a stern hard woman as she watched the family holdings she had striven to protect being squandered and depleted. Her sternness was directed for the most part upon her children, however, whom she ever regarded as children who needed to be kept in line. To old friends, she showed

affection and appreciation: "late non onkyndnesse be schewed to hym
.... Remembyre ho keynd and true hartyd he hath ben to vus" (Davis,
212), she writes of James Gresham.

When Margaret Paston died in 1484, many people in Norfolk must have felt the poorer for her shrewd mind and her firm moral fibre had guided many lives and touched many more. Even today her strength of character and her powerful personality stand before us in her letters and leave an impression not easily forgotten.

CHAPTER IV

If a chronicle of the Pastons had been written, Margaret Paston would without doubt have stood out as a remarkable member of the family but, depending on the point of view of the chronicler, she might not have been presented as a more outstanding figure than her father-in-law Justice William, her husband John I or even her son John III, whose prominence in Norfolk affairs developed after the letters had ceased to be saved. However, because the Pastons have become famous through their correspondence, Margaret, the writer of more letters than any other member of the family, is the one on whom attention is focused — and deservedly so. It is to Margaret as the writer of letters that this chapter is to be devoted.

It would be tempting to look to Margaret's letters for undeniable evidence of the state of colloquial English in fifteenth-century Norfolk, but unfortunately her employment of scribes precludes the use of her letters for certain aspects of linguistics. As far as orthography is concerned, her letters reflect the habits and development of her amanuenses only.

Phonologically, the persistent use of short e[ɛ] for short i[I] by most of her scribes indicates that it was a characteristic that she shared with them. Only John Wykes uses wrytyn while her other scribes have wretyn. Short e[ɛ] appears for short a[æ] in the word Herry, all in the hand of the 1448-54 scribe, yet Harry appears in Wykes' hand

in 1465 (Davis, 185). Short a[æ] for short e[ɛ] is used by several scribes: John Daubeney has aleccion, both he and Gloys have massanger and an unidentified hand has askapid. There is no way of knowing whether the written words reflect Margaret's pronunciation or that of the scribe. Letter 153 (Davis) shows how cautious one must be in attempting to determine Margaret's pronunciation for it is written in two hands, the first unidentified and the second that of Daubeney. The first hand shows hvsyd and the second has vsyd, both following words ending in consonants; the first writes Kyrstemesse, a metathesis of the second's Crystemes; in these cases, which of the two forms did Margaret dictate? Letter 129 (Davis) is also in two hands, the body in the hand of James Gresham and the postscript in the hand of Margaret's unidentified 1448-54 scribe. In this letter, Gresham has forthyng while ferdyng appears in the postscript; again, which form if either was Margaret's?

Margaret shares with all the early writers of the Letters the use of medial d before er, presumably with the value [d]: modyr, whedyr, oder, perhaps indicating a degree of regional conservatism, as Dobson says that d in this position was replaced by th from 1400 onwards.¹ The later letters show th far more frequently than d although modyr remains constant throughout the Letters. But Margaret uses d initially as well: dys day, dens 'thence', dan, dedyr. This use of d and the confusion of th with t in Mawthby, Mawteby, Mawdby, prayit, owth 'out' and thernot 'dare not' suggest to me that in the fifteenth century d and t were post-dental and unaspirate consonants

as in modern French and Spanish and not alveolar and aspirate as in modern English. I have not been able to find any comment about this problem, but a present-day French-speaker's confusing three and tree supports my premise.

There is a single letter (Davis, 124) in which there is evidence of the unvoicing of [g]: longke 'long' and Markaryte, the only instances of this phenomenon I have found in the Letters. I should like to think that this letter is autograph; it is the first of Margaret's letters to her husband, Davis remarks that the hand is "crude and unpractised" and has not been able to identify it, and furthermore it is a very short letter, yet it deals with several topics with barely a sentence devoted to each, topics which Margaret would surely have enlarged upon had she had a scribe at her disposal. One sentence which I shall mention later is almost incoherent, evidence that combines with the handwriting to show an inexperienced writer. If Margaret could write at all, it is likely that she would have written her first letter to John I herself before she became caught up in the many duties of housewife and mother.

The elision of syllables is another problem which is not solved in Margaret's letters. In Letter 129, Gresham shows Wymondham but the scribe of the postscript has Wymdham. The fact that Gloys has Wymdham (Davis, 143) and John III has Wyndham (Davis, 152) really does not prove anything. Likewise, how did Margaret pronounce William Worcester's name? Richard Calle has Wurcestre (Davis, 156) and John III has Worcester (Davis, 157) but Daubeney shows Worcetre (Davis,

169). Other words which pose a similar question are Castell (Davis, 143), amrel (admiral) (Davis, 134) and schepeherd (Davis, 132).

The spelling of kawt and bawt shows fairly conclusively that the spirant [X] was no longer pronounced.

Certain evidence of Margaret's morphology, the use of eth in the third person singular of the present tense, has been noted in Chapter II. Besides this, there is an occasional lack of ending in the genitive singular of nouns of personal relationship: hyr broder ad-vice (Davis, 160) and there are several instances of a possible confusion of the genitive singular ending and his: Maister John Estgate ys brothere (Davis, 190), Seynt Barnaby is Day (Davis, 226) and your fader ys will (Davis, 198). Letters in the hand of Wykes show this characteristic more frequently than any others, although Letter 226 is in an unidentified hand. Margaret also omits the plural ending in iiij horse (Davis, 154), perhaps employing the same idiom as the modern two sheep and three deer.

The only letter of which the draft and the fair copy survive (Davis, 209) shows how Margaret's syntax was occasionally changed by her scribe. The draft is written in the same hand in two styles, of which the second is that of the fair copy; however, the first style has more modern spelling than the second. In the draft, there is the phrase, gewe so myche fore them, in the fair copy, geue fore hem so mych; in this instance, the draft has the more modern syntax, but which is Margaret's? The general improvement of syntax in the fair copy, however, suggests that the draft is closer to what Margaret

dictated; for example wyth-ought he hath is altered to wyth-owt that he haue, it shall dysawayll hym better than be trebyll the money to yt shall dysawayll hym be trebyll per-of, and in the sentence, it shuld haue be to vs a grete rebwke to us, the second to us is omitted in the fair copy.

The tidying up of Margaret's sentence structure by her scribe as seen in Letter 209 is one reason why I think her first letter is autograph. I do not feel that a scribe with any self-respect would have written "And þa[t] had nowte a be 3e xul a be atte home þis Qwesontyde, and I suppose þat 3e xul be atte home er owte longke" (Davis, 124).

Letter 209 poses a fundamental question as to how seriously any of the letters written by amanuenses can be taken as evidence of the state of the language of the Pastons. Davis states that the hand is unskilled, yet the first part of the draft has I must ell nedes sell all my woodes against I mwst ell nedys sellyn all my woodys in the fair copy; both the spelling and the form of the infinitive are more conservative in the latter. In the phrase gewe so myche for them, altered to geue fore hem so mych, the modern them is changed to hem. Apparently even an inexperienced scribe wrote a fairly modern specimen of English in the draft and then quite deliberately altered it to a much more conservative style in the fair copy. Does this indicate that, just as there was a recognized form for fifteenth-century letters, there was also a recognized antiquated style of language and spelling that even Margaret's inexperienced scribe knew was required for letter-writing?

When one considers "your letter of the 14th inst." used within living memory, it is not impossible. On the other hand, if Margaret could read, it may have been she who was responsible for the conservative spelling. Her insisting on old spelling would account for the change of style in the draft for she may well have taken a look at the draft and admonished her scribe for using "that modern nonsense", just as a modern writer might object to the spelling of nite for night in a letter bearing his name. Of the two explanations, I think the second is the more tenable for Justice William's letters written in more modern English than Margaret's must have been acceptable to fifteenth-century taste.

However much the Letters reflect or fail to reflect the natural orthography, phonology, morphology and syntax of letter-writers, Margaret's vocabulary must to a large extent be expressed in her letters. Such outstanding examples of regional vocabulary as lwmysch, schittelwitted, crod and brethel have been noted in Chapter II. Most of these regional words are used in early letters to John I as Margaret, knowing that he would be familiar with them, perhaps used them unself-consciously but avoided them in letters to her sons for fear of seeming unsophisticated, or perhaps she simply outgrew them as her own ability as a letter-writer developed. Some words she may have changed herself while others may have been altered for her by her scribe. Emme (Davis, 126) is replaced by hunckyl (Davis, 127); mykyle is used adjectivally as late as 1469 (Davis, 205) but mysche is used later in the same letter, written in Edmond II's hand, and meche appears both earlier and later

(e.g. Letters 192 and 228, both in different unidentified hands). An example of the possibility of Margaret's speech being altered by her scribe is the form elmyse as it appears in letters in Gloys' hand (Davis, 215) while Edmond II writes enmyes (Davis, 212). Which did Margaret actually say or, conscious of both forms, did she say both at different times or to different people?

When considering Margaret's letters from a linguistic point of view, then, much caution must be observed. From the point of view of style, Letter 209 shows that some small changes have been made in sentence structure but, on the whole, the larger pattern of diction and attitude which changes according to Margaret's age, her addressee and to some extent to her scribe must be considered her own.

Wyld's statement that Margaret "writes a slip-shod style"² is to some extent true. Her style is never as polished or sophisticated as that of her two eldest sons, nor is it as concise or lucid as that of her husband; she shows a tendency to run-on sentences and is rather wordy. While Wyld's statement that she set "down as far as possible the forms of her ordinary speech"³ is based on his mistaken belief that Margaret wrote her letters in her own hand, her letters probably do reflect the style of her everyday speech. A letter to John I illustrates this: "3owr closys and 3owr pastowr lythe all opyn be-cawse he may not gon abrodde to don hem amendyn, and 3owr schep ar not lokyd at as þey xuld ben for þer is no schepeherd but Hodgis sonys, for oper scheperd dare non abyd þer ner com up-on þe comown be-cawse þat Wichyngham men thretyn hem to bete if þei comen on here komon" (Davis,

132). It is understandable that Margaret might write with such freedom to her husband, but one would expect more care in a letter to Dame Elizabeth Brews in which Margaret attempts to heal the breach between the two families and hasten the day of John III's marriage; yet she writes,

And, madam, I prey yow þat I may haue parfyte knowlage be my son Yeluerton, berar here-of, when thys metyng schall be, yf ye thynk it expedyent, and þe soner the better in eschewyng of worse; for, madam, I know well yf yt be not concludyd in ryght schort tyme, that as for my son, he entendyth to doo ryght by my cosyn Margery and not so well by hym-self, and þat schuld be to me, nor I trust to yow, no gret plesure yf yt so fortunyd — as God deffend, whom I be-seche to send yow your levest desyers (Davis, 226).

However lacking in literary art her style may be, it expresses her feelings clearly and often picturesquely. There is a marked difference, though, between letters written to members of her own generation and letters to her sons, for Margaret knew no soul-searching on the subject of the "generation gap" — to her each generation was separated by an unfathomable gulf. She always referred to John I's parents with the greatest of formal courtesy and she expected the same from her own children: "I thynke 3e sette butte lytyl be myn blyssyng, and yf ye dede ye wulde a desyyr dyt in yowyr wrytyng to me" (Davis, 227), she once reproaches John II, a man of thirty-five. It is only in letters to her contemporaries that Margaret feels as though she were addressing equals and is able to write in a relaxed manner. Even her letter of momentous importance to Dame Elizabeth Brews shows a comfortable awareness of writing to one of her own generation: "I thynke or ye and I departe þat þe defawte schall be knowe where yt ys, and also that, wyth yowyr advyse and helpe and myn to-gedyrs, we schall take some

wey þat yt schal not breke" (Davis, 226). In a letter which is probably addressed to Gloys, she says, "Ye haue lyghtyd myne hert þerin by a pound." She is obviously writing to an equal: "And me lyketh myne abydyng and þe contré here right well, and I trust whan sommer comith and fayre wethere I schall lyke it bettere, for I am cherysed here botte to well." Yet she is aware of his position as a priest: "I pray you hertely, yeue it be no dysese to you, þat ye will take the laboure to bryng Walter theyr he schuld be" (Davis, 220) — she is not over-awed by him but she respects the cloth.

But it is in letters to her husband that Margaret can really be herself and her letters to him show the greatest variety of style. I have mentioned her sense of humour which is apparent only in letters to John I, and even as late as 1465 she expects him to share her amusement: "Ye wyll laugh for to here alle þe processe of the demenyng ther" (Davis, 192). To him she also shows a fine irony: "Yeluerton is a good thredbare frend for yow" (Davis, 168), she links Heydon with "sum oper of vwre gode frendys" (Davis, 128), and of Elizabeth Clere's non-existent husband she says, "he is non nerrere than he was before" (Davis, 146). A letter to John III in 1475 shows that Margaret can still make an ironical comment: "Recomaunde me to yowyr graunt dam. I wold she war her in Norffolk as well at es as evyr I sy hyr, and as lytyll rewlyd be hyr son as evyr she was" (Davis, 222) but the humour has gone and only bitterness remains.

Only in early letters to John I does Margaret indulge in downright gossip in the midst of local news. When Heydon's wife has a

child that is apparently not his, Margaret reports, "he sayd 3yf sche come in hesse precence to make here exkewce þat he xuld kyt of here nose to makyn here to be know wat sche is, and yf here chyld come in hesse presence he seyð he wuld kyllyn" (Davis, 127). Her apposite turn of phrase undoubtedly tells her husband to whom she is referring when she says, "Kateryn Walsam xal be weddyd... to þe galaw[n]te wyth þe grete chene" (Davis, 128). When reporting rumours she is careful to say so and introduces the rumour with such phrases as "as it is told me" (Davis, 128) or "I here seyn" (Davis, 131). More often, she reports fact and gives the source of the news: "Barow told me" (Davis, 132). She tries to be accurate in reporting speech so that many of her letters contain such phrases as "And John of Dame seyð.... And also Yelverton seyð opynly.... And yet he seyð..." (Davis, 167). When she herself is involved in the conversation, the method of reporting is similar: "And then I haskyd hym.... He counseld me... and so I told hyr. Then she seyð..." (Davis, 160).

Margaret's style to her husband varies from the easy colloquial reporting of gossip and local news to a somber moralizing tone which bespeaks an intimate knowledge of the language of preachers or of passages from the Bible which she may have heard read at Divine Services. A balanced Biblical style can be seen in "and it ys grete heuenys to youre frendys and welwyllers, and grete joy and confort to youre ennemyes" (Davis, 181) and these words seem to come straight from the New Testament: "And on the sam day at evynsong tyme Harleston com to me to Haylesdon" (Davis, 182). A stern moralizing tone is seen

in her observation, "men cut large thongys here of othere mens lethere" (Davis, 190) and in her remark that Heydon "doyth it closely, as he ys wont to doo, and wayshyth hys hondys therof as Pylate dyde" (Davis, 185).

As the years go by, Margaret's style acquires a dignity not seen in the first few light-hearted, carefree letters. Between the Molyne troubles of the early fifties and Fastolf's death in 1459, there had been a period of quiet growth and consolidation in the Paston fortunes. Nowhere is this more evident than in Margaret's character. While in 1451, Margaret's determination and fortitude could never be doubted, by 1459 she is a woman of stature, one who acts as her husband's representative in Norfolk and one to whom her neighbours turn for comfort and help. No longer capable of being shamed by a poor necklace, she is now a lady to whom the mayor of Norwich sends dinner. The dignity seen in letters to John I can occasionally be shattered by the flush of triumph or excitement, but that in letters to her sons is intensified by the "generation gap" and is sustained as she grows older. It is a stately lady who writes, "Therefore I pray you help here, for so God help me I haue right gret peté on here and it is right gret almes to help here.... Also I wuld ye shuld desire your brother to be good mayster on-to here" (Davis, 219).

Dignity coupled with severity is frequent in Margaret's later letters. Her uncompromising sternness causes her to write a protest to her cousin, John Berney: "I wolde ye shulde remember that ye haue bore blame for sweche thyngis be-fore this tyme that hath be do othirwise thanne lawe hath requerid" (Davis, 197). To John II, she writes, "I

meruel meche þat 3e haue delte a3en soo symply wyth Sporle, consyderyng þat 3e and yowyr frendys had so mech to doo for to geetyt yow a-3en onys.... Yt causyth me to be in gret dowte of yow what yowyr dysposycion wul be here-aftyr" (Davis, 227). Although she has less cause to be censorious of John III, she can be equally abrupt: "As ye may remembyr þat I spak to yow for þe xx^{ti} li, for my cosyn Clere, spek to yowyr hunkyll ther-of and send me an ansswer ther of in hast" (Davis, 223).

As in the case of Margaret's linguistics, an attempt must be made to determine to what extent her style depends on her scribe. Her sonorous, Biblical style occurs in letters in the hand of Wykes, but these letters were written in 1465 at the time of the loss of Drayton and Hellesdon when Margaret might well have been thinking along fatalistic or religious lines. Since other letters written for both Margaret and John II in Wykes' hand are not Biblical in tone, the style is probably Margaret's rather than Wykes'. However, there is the possibility that a characteristic in style can be reinforced by the scribe. While Margaret can be uncompromising in her severity to John II in a letter in an unidentified hand: "I wul nat be compellyd to pay yowyr dettys a-3ens my well" (Davis, 227), those in which her severity is most apparent are usually in Gloys' hand. One can picture her looking at Gloys with a questioning cock of the eye-brow as if to say, "Am I being too hard on the lad?" and Gloys replying impatiently, "Certainly not; he needs a firm hand." Thus encouraged, she writes, "þerfore be neuer the boldere in yowre exspences for any help þat ye trost to haue of me, for I wull fro hens-forth bryng my-self ought of such daungere

as I stond in for your sakes" (Davis, 208). It may be significant that she holds the letter until Edmond can add a postscript: "I send 3ow ij scherte clothys, iche of iij 3ardys of þe fynest þat is in thys towne. I xuld a do hem mad here but yt xuld a be to long here 3e xuld an had hem. 3owr aunte ore sum othere good woman wule do here almes vp-on 3ow fore þe mak yng of them" (Davis, 208).

From her earliest to her latest letters, one of Margaret's habits of speech persists; she repeatedly starts a sentence with "I soppose". Occasionally, the repetition of a word may be the result of her scribe's influence such as the use of "mysgouernyd" and two instances of "mysgouernauns" within five lines of a letter in Gloys' hand (Davis, 143) and three instances of "cnowlage" within five lines in a letter of Jonn III's hand (Davis, 152). While the latter occurs fairly regularly, the former is rare in Margaret's letters.

An able, practical woman who coped with each daunting difficulty as it arose, Margaret could never be accused of being conceited; never would she have dreamed that her letters would be pored over and studied and analyzed five centuries after they were written. She wrote with the simple intention of communicating with absent members of the family; she wrote, as far as the process of dictating a letter would allow, as if she were speaking. If in her letters there is poetry, it is because there was poetry in her speech. Perhaps hearing alliterative verse read aloud prompted "a flykeryng felowe" (Davis, 180) or "he hythid hym hens in hast" (Davis, 149); perhaps someone else's comment gave rise to "the Duck of Suffolk ys abyll to kype dayly in hys hows more men

then Dabeney hadde herys in hys hede", but surely Margaret herself was responsible for "I xhall thynke my--selfe halfe a wedowe because ye xal not be at home" (Davis, 153).

Margaret's letters show that she not only communicated facts but that she created word-pictures which adorned and illuminated the facts. She not only communicated with those who knew her well, but she still communicates with us in the twentieth century. From her letters, we can build a picture of a woman and her life: her marriage, her husband and her children, her day-to-day tasks, the super-human tasks she was called upon to undertake by circumstance, her friends, her relatives, her enemies, those who influenced her, her attitude towards people and institutions, and above all her emotions, her hopes and her disappointments, her despair and her faith. Out of her letters speaks not a character in a play or in a novel but a living woman of Medieval England.

CHAPTER V

Among the six collections of fifteenth-century letters, The Plumpton Correspondence¹ and The Stonor Letters and Papers² in addition to The Paston Letters contain letters written by women. Besides these, two letters in The Cely Papers³ refer to a business transaction made by one of the women of the family, although she herself writes no letters.

When Sir Robert Plumpton was brought to trial for encumbering the marriage settlements of some of his daughters, his first wife Dame Agnes was left to deal with affairs at home. Her few letters written between 1502 and 1504 report her efforts to cope without help or encouragement from her husband. Since they are written for business purposes alone, they tell us nothing about her children or her interests. They do, however, provide a picture -- similar to that of Margaret Paston -- of a woman who was entrusted with the management of large estates during her husband's absence. Dame Agnes died in 1504 and, a year later, Sir Robert married Dame Isabel, a member of the Neville family. Dame Isabel's single letter indicates that the Plumpton affairs were going from bad to worse and that she was in desperate financial straits. One other letter in The Plumpton Correspondence, that of Sir Robert's daughter Dorothy, throws light on the unhappiness of a girl living in another household as a ward.

Some of the joylessness of life that is seen in the letters of the Plumpton women is echoed in those of Dame Jane Stonor, who wrote

only four letters at widely-spaced intervals from 1463 to about 1475 (the last letter is of uncertain date). However, the letters of her daughter-in-law Dame Elizabeth Stonor, who married Sir William Stonor in 1475, are a delight to read. The widow of a wealthy London wool merchant, she brought to her new husband a sound knowledge of the wool trade useful to a man with great sheep runs, a business partner in the person of Thomas Betson, four children, and her own cheerful, masterful self. In return, she gained a loving husband, a kind and generous step-father for her children, and social prestige. Her thirteen letters, most of which were written when she was absent from Stonor and in London, are those of a happy, sophisticated woman, equally at home in London or in Oxfordshire. They are the letters of a woman who had everything, who saw no threatening clouds looming on her horizon, and whose only complaint was that her brother-in-law was accusing her of social climbing: "[that] I [wold] plok from your lyelod alle that I can" (S.L., 175). Dame Elizabeth died in 1479 after only four years of marriage to Sir William and her letters written during those four years depict a brief period of complete happiness. As to whether her exuberant personality could have weathered the storm of her husband's implication in Buckingham's rebellion and the problems of growing old we can only speculate.

I should like to show, first, how Margaret Paston's letters compare with the letters in the other collections and, second, how she compares with the women as a wife and mother, as a business-woman, and as a person in her own right.

Besides the usual polite greetings and endings, the letters of these four collections have much in common in subject matter. While each letter was usually written for a specific purpose, the writers also report of the health of the family, convey local news, and ask for purchases to be made. The Cely men are scrupulous in reassuring the absent member about the well-being of the family, often mentioning each member separately: "owr father and mother brother godfather and all owr howssowld wher in good heyll" (C.P., 24). Agnes Plumpton, too, is careful in this respect: "I, and my sone William, with all your children, are in good health" (P.C., CXXXIII). Elizabeth Stonor has few opportunities for this kind of message as she writes when she is in London and her husband and children are at Stonor but, when the occasion arises, she is reassuring: "Your chylderne and myne ffare well" (S.L., 172). The Pastons alone seem very casual in this respect; Margaret adds a brief postscript to an early letter: "Your sone faryth wel" (Davis, 126) and Agnes reports to John I, "my doughtyr your wyfe, che faryt well... and all your sonys and doughtrys" (Davis, 20), but the references to the health of the family are so few that it is no surprise to read John II's complaint: "as towchyng my sustre Anne, I vndrestand she hathe ben passyng seek, but I wende þat she had ben weddyd" (Davis, 282).

Since the absent member of a family was frequently in a city, he was in a position to buy things that were not available at home. Just as Margaret entrusted commissions to her husband and sons, the people at home — with the exception of Sir Robert Plumpton's wives,

who probably recognized the futility of asking him for anything — made frequent requests for purchases. Dame Isabel makes the sole request in The Plumpton Correspondence, a very curt reminder, "Sir, remember your chiller bookes" (P.C., CLXII). In the Stonor family, it is Dame Elizabeth who travelled to London, so her requests are not for purchases but for conveniences from home: "I praye you to bryng with you the ij baysons and hewers off silver, the silver Candelstikes and the monstrans and the letill silver bayson to set it in" (S.L., 168). In fact, it is she who made purchases for her husband: "as ffor your gownys of chamlet and dublettes of sylke, I have bought hem: the which shall plese yow ryght well, I trust to God" (S.L., 176). Surprisingly enough, the most frequent requests occur in The Cely Papers where the writers ask for "saddyllys styropys and spowrs and clothe for hosyn" (C.P., 27), among other things.

Of all the women, the Plumptons have the least to say about local news that was not directly concerned with the business of their letters. Poor souls, they were probably too distraught to think of anything but their problems and too irritated with Sir Robert to be concerned with his entertainment. Dame Elizabeth Stonor's letters, however, show that she and Margaret Paston had many experiences in common. Both women went on pilgrimages; Margaret, as we have seen, made at least two and Dame Elizabeth speaks of "my pilgramages" in the sentence following "my ffadyrs deryge" (S.L., 229) which suggests that the two events may have been related. Both women were pleased to have been present at royal gatherings. Margaret gives a lively

account of Margaret of Anjou's visit to Norwich and the Queen's attention to Elizabeth Clere, and Dame Elizabeth reports that she went to Greenwich with "my Lady of Southfolke" where she saw "the metyng betwyne the Kynge and my ladye his Modyr. And trewly me thowght it was a very good syght" (S.L., 172). Both women enjoyed visiting relatives and friends and being entertained at dinner, although these events were probably more of a treat to Margaret than to the sophisticated Dame Elizabeth. However, even Dame Elizabeth saw fit to report such occasions to her husband, perhaps as much for his pleasure as for her own: "on ffryday last past I dyende with my ffadir and my modir" (S.L., 176).

It seems, then, that women in similar circumstances had similar pleasures and, when not too greatly pressed by the exigencies of day-to-day living, they delighted in sharing them with their husbands. But none of the letters of the Stonor or Plumpton women match those of Margaret Paston in the wide variety of news items that she relates to John I ranging from the comings and goings of friends and gossip about an unfaithful wife to robbery, manslaughter and the plague.

As far as the main purpose of the women's letters is concerned, those of the Plumpton women are strictly business-like. They describe the situation they are coping with and ask for help. During John Paston's frequent and sometimes prolonged absences, it was Margaret's duty to keep him informed about anything that could possibly affect the Paston fortunes. For this reason, the business parts of her letters mention in detail the proceedings in hundred and shire courts,

the attitudes of the Sheriff and of those whose help John may need as well as problems concerning tenancies. Dame Elizabeth Stonor's letters, on the other hand, treat briefly but adequately of the business she is doing in London, but she is much happier writing about herself and her family.

Having noted the similarities and differences in the letters of Dame Agnes, Dame Elizabeth and Margaret Paston, let us now see what we can find out about the women themselves. Although women in the upper levels of society seldom married for love, they did frequently come to love their husbands and were not hesitant to say so. Like Margaret, Dame Elizabeth was not backward in expressing the desire to see her husband; she once writes, "I thynke hyt ryght longe syth I speke with yow" (S.L., 226), her wording being similar to Margery Paston's "I thynke longe sen I lay in your armes" (Davis, 417). Like Margery, Dame Elizabeth makes a frank reference to intimate moments which is tantalizing incomplete in the manuscript: "I se well ye [re]membre þe puttyng at... out off þe bed whan you and I lay last togedyr" (S.L., 175). That Margaret Paston makes no such remarks may be the result of a more inhibited personality or it may be because she probably wrote none of her letters herself, while Dame Elizabeth's and Margery's remarks are written in their own hands. Margery, of course, married for love and there is nothing in Dame Elizabeth's letters to suggest that the Stonors did not love each other dearly; indeed, "The Stonor Letters give us on the whole a uniform impression of family affection."⁴ The Plumpton women express no overt affection

for Sir Robert, possibly because his grasping, quarrelsome nature forbade it or possibly because their letters were written when they were overburdened with toil and worry; they want him home, true, but only to relieve them of the stress his absence has placed on them. Because of their extent, it is in Margaret Paston's letters alone that the early flush of first love can be seen to ripen into a firm relationship of affection, trust and respect as she and John trod the years, facing prosperity and adversity together.

The Paston, Plumpton and Stonor Letters show that the wives had a clear understanding of their husbands' affairs and could, with the exception of Dame Agnes Plumpton, act in their stead when the men were absent. Dame Agnes was faced with a situation which would have daunted any woman, for her husband had left orders that the leases of some tenants were not to be renewed and that the tenants were to be turned off their farms. This her son William had done, but the tenants had obtained the favour of no less a person than the Archbishop of York. "Sir, it is so that my lord Archbishop hath indytt my sone William and xvi of his servants, on tewsday was a senit.... And I cannot get the copie of the indytement, for my Lord hath it in his hands" (P.C., CXXXVI), she writes. Her letters do not tell the outcome of this matter but they do set forth the details in a clear matter-of-fact manner, which speaks for her grasp of the situation. Even Margaret Paston, who braved the Duke of Suffolk's men at Drayton and waylaid judges, dared not disobey the Bishop of Norwich when he decided that her daughter's betrothal to Richard Calle was binding.

Dame Elizabeth Stonor admittedly had the easiest time of any of the women for during her married life the Stonors enjoyed the security of long-established landowners whose lands were not coveted by their neighbours nor greatly encumbered with litigation concerning ownership. About the management of vast tracts of land and of manors, she seems rather vague: "I conseve by your wrytyng that you have had very meych a do with holdyng of cortes and odir besynes" (S.L., 175). Her attitude in this respect seems casual compared with that of Margaret Paston, who could afford to take nothing for granted but who appreciated the significance of holding a manor court, who knew the importance of gathering rents, guarding woods, and visiting tenants. Nevertheless, in her own sphere, the busy streets and marts of London, Dame Elizabeth was completely business-like; she reports that Thomas Betson "thynkithe that xiiij markes and a d[i...] pryse for to bye lx saks; after that pryce it wold draw myche m[oney] and lytell gettyng suld be therin" (S.L., 175). When wool arrives in London, she writes, "I have resseyved] hyte and fayer howsyd hyt" (S.L., 180). She buys supplies for her husband: "as to cheyng the hodgeyshed of salte that you wrote [to] me for... I wold a sente yt to you with alle my harte, but þe bargys wer departyd before your letter cam [unto] me" (S.L., 175); and she pays his bills when she can: "I praye you to remembre the matter I spake to you off at your departyng... ffor Cobbe call apon me dayly ffor money, and the bere wyffe with oper" (S.L., 229).

While Sir William Stonor does not appear to have liked parting with his brass, Dame Agnes Plumpton was having trouble collecting it.

Because people knew that her husband was financially embarrassed, they would not pay what goods were worth, and Dame Agnes has to report that "they have sold... one oke that is worth x1^d for xij^d" (P.C., CLIII). Margaret Paston, too, complains of falling prices: "as for the pris of malte, it is fallen here sore for it is worthe but ij s. viij d. j quarter at Yermoth" (Davis, 189), but she is prepared to bargain hard to get the best price she can for anything. She tells one tenant that he must pay more for a marsh or else "he shuld no lenger have it for ye myght [have] other fermors therto that wold geve ther-fore as it was late be-fore." She is waiting for his answer but admits to John, "I can get non other fermor therto yet" (Davis, 178).

Two letters in The Cely Papers refer to a business transaction which one of the women of the family apparently was making on her own account. John Cely writes: "... my sistur youre aunte hath made a bargin wyth John Mathew mercer of London and shall reseve off hym at such days as she and he be agreyd lxxv li. xvj s. viij d. ster: and she hath delyverd hym youre bylle of youre hand be the wiche he must reseve of you now att this marte iiij xx xj li. flemysse the wiche she praith you to paie to the said John Mathew or to his atorney or bringer of your bylle acordyng to her convinaunte and promisse" (C.P., 39).⁵

Besides helping in their husbands' business affairs, both Dame Elizabeth and Margaret Paston offer their husbands advice when they see fit. As I have shown, Margaret tells John of land that can be bought and reminds him of those to whom he owes thanks. When Dame Elizabeth

feels that Sir William is being negligent, she writes, "I praye you to remembre my sonne Betson: ffor he hath mych a doo with money now, and he trustith veraly to your promesse: ffor Godes sake, syr, lett hym nat be forgotten" (S.L., 229). Although Dame Elizabeth's plea for action is much stronger than anything Margaret Paston ever wrote to John, it does not compare with the desperation with which Dame Agnes Plumpton writes: "Sir, I besech you to remember your great cost and charges, and myne, and labor the matter that it myght have an end... For without ye get some comaundement, I wott not how your house shalbe kept, for I know not wherof to levy one penyworth" (P.C., CLI). Dame Isabel is even more outspoken, "Sir, I told you this or ye went, but ye wolde not beleve me... And your Lenten stoufe is to bey, and I wote not what to do, God wote, for I am ever left of thes fashion" (P.C., CLXII).

While Margaret Paston could never complain about her husband's diligence in attending to family matters, her reproaches to John II sound remarkably like those of the Plumpton women: "I wold ye shuld purvey for yourself as hastely as ye may and come home and take heed to your owne, and to myn therto, otherwise thanne ye haue do bifore this... I haue litell help nor comfort of non of yow yet" (Davis, 207).

There is no doubt that Dame Agnes Plumpton felt, like Margaret Paston and Dame Elizabeth Stonor, a strong sense of duty to her husband. Whether her affection for her husband matched theirs cannot be judged from her few letters, nor can her attitude toward her thirteen children as she only mentions one and he is referred to as impersonally as if he

were an employee.

The letters of Margaret Paston and Dame Elizabeth Stonor, however, give a good insight into these two mothers' feelings for their children and their treatment of them. In this respect, the two women differ, although it is perhaps unfair to compare Margaret's whole life with its ups and downs with the four happy years of Dame Elizabeth that are recorded in her letters. Fortune was smiling on her, for she had married a man who indulged her and who had accepted her children wholeheartedly. More than once she expresses her gratification: "And Syr, as towchyng my childeryn, I hertly thanke you that hit lyke you so for to tend them" (S.L., 169). She seems to have made no attempt to find households in which they could be placed as wards; instead she brought to the Stonors the four Fenn children who were her wards⁶ and strove to obtain the wardship of others. She regretted her husband's absence on one occasion, for had he been at home he "shuld had the warde and possession of Lovels daughters" (S.L., 237).

Margaret Paston has nothing to say about the wards in her household and I have shown how anxious she was not to have her daughters under her own roof. Her attitude towards Margery and Anne is much more akin to that of Dame Jane Stonor whose two daughters were wards of the Duchess of Suffolk in 1476. Three years previously one of them had complained of being unhappy, but Dame Jane wrote explaining that the girl was placed "as it plesyd be quene to put yow," and that she and her husband "neyther dar nor wyll take upon us to reseyve yow" (S.L., 120). The reason for the girl's unhappiness may be contained in Dame

Elizabeth's letter in which she writes that "my lady of Southfolke is halfindell dysplesyd because that my Cystere Barantyne is no better arayed, and leke wyse my Cyster Elysabeth" (S.L., 172). Dorothy Plumpton, too, was unhappy as a ward of Lady Darcy, and begged her father:

to send a servant of yours to my lady and to me, and shew by your fatherly kyndnesse that I am your child; for I have sent you dyverse messuages and wryttings, and I had never answeare againe. Wherefore, yt is thought in this parties, by those persones that list better to say ill than good, that ye have litle favor unto me; the which error ye may now quench, yf yt will like you to be so good and kynd father unto me (P.C., CLXV).

Thus, while Margaret Paston's attitude towards her daughters' wardship differed from that of Dame Elizabeth, it was not untypical of women of the fifteenth century.

But the difference between Margaret and Dame Elizabeth is nowhere so evident as in their behaviour over a daughter's marriage. Richard Calle, who had been associated with the Paston family since about 1455⁷, was a trusted, honest, hard-working employee, yet his marriage to Margery was opposed even though the two young people were very much in love. Whether "my sonne Bettson" was a relative or simply a business associate of the Riches is not known, but his marriage to Dame Elizabeth's daughter Katherine Riche was encouraged in every way, even though he could offer her no exalted social position and was, after Dame Elizabeth's death, in debt to Sir William Stonor to the tune of one thousand, two hundred pounds (S.L., 310), a vast sum of money in those days. Although Dame Elizabeth is seen bargaining for a marriage for another of her daughters in true fifteenth-century fashion (S.L., 176), she respected the love match of Thomas Betson and Katherine.

When Margaret Paston is considered alone, the variety in her life, her undertakings and achievements are very impressive, but beside Dame Elizabeth, she fades into a middle-class provincial woman, a woman with narrower horizons than the sophisticated Dame Elizabeth who travelled back and forth between London and Oxfordshire. Dame Elizabeth is an outgoing, expansive woman, and everything she does and everything concerning her is on a large scale. While Margaret has to remind John I to get her a single piece of jewellery, Dame Elizabeth begs Sir William to "send me no more ryngis with stonys: ffore the ryng that you sent... the stone is ffallyn owght be the way and loste" (S.L., 172). While Margaret advises her husband where to buy cloth at the best price and asks for a small piece at a time — a yard for a hood, three and a half yards for a gown — Dame Elizabeth orders cloth in fourteen and sixteen-yard lengths; at one time, she even gets thirty-eight yards of "grene sarcenet at vs. the yerd" (S.L., 252). It is true that we are never told how much fabric was required for the Paston liveries, but Margaret advises her husband that she can get the goods for thirteen pence a yard (Davis, 132), a far cry from five shillings. In fact, unlike Margaret who watched her pennies, Dame Elizabeth was more than once warned of her extravagance by Thomas Betson: "I will avyse you, madame, to remembre large expensez and be ware of them, and in lyke wyse my mayster your husbaund" (S.L., 211). However ambitious John Paston was, no one would ever have written such words to him or to his wife.

While Margaret constantly defers to her husband, even though

well able to make decisions and act on them when she has to, Dame Elizabeth, a masterful wilful woman, does not hesitate to write to her husband, "and perffore, good syr, remembre myn horsse on Setterday with owte ffawte" (S.L., 229). Thomas Betson sums up this side of Dame Elizabeth's character when he writes of her recovery from an illness: "she tooke hir will in that matter lyke as she doyth in all oper" (S.L., 207).

Despite her shortcomings, there is a flair to Dame Elizabeth that is lacking in Margaret Paston. The fluency and ease with which she appears to have dashed off her letters contrast with Margaret's painstaking and often pedestrian composition. She flashes brilliantly, but only briefly, across the tapestry of fifteenth-century England; she is not seen, as Margaret Paston is, during the weeks and months that followed her first husband's death; she did not live, as Margaret did, to grieve over the death of two and perhaps three of her children and to experience disillusionment and sorrow on their account. In the four years of her letters, there is no struggle to attain position or wealth; she is seen at her peak, confident and serene, with nothing to threaten her security.

Margaret Paston's letters, on the other hand, cover not only the twenty-six years of her married life, but continue for another eleven years and, after 1477, there are letters addressed to her and there are others which refer to her right up to her death in 1484. In this way Margaret is seen developing from a fresh, spontaneous girl who, despite the formality of her marriage arrangements, could love

and joke with her husband, to a lonely grandmother who had withdrawn to her ancestral home. Her early letters show the fun-loving, light-hearted girl gradually taking on the responsibilities of raising a family, of keeping a large household and of looking after her husband's affairs in his absence. What she would have been like had John Hawteyne and Lord Molynes not crossed her path or had Sir John Fastolf not left his wide lands to her husband is impossible to say. As a result of these events, Margaret experienced violence to her own person and she grew to fear the danger that haunted the footsteps of her loved ones and those dependent upon her. She knew the bitterness of watching the fruits of her husband's labour squandered by the son in whose favour she had braved John I's displeasure. She lived with the loneliness which followed the deaths of that son, John II, and her favourite, Walter, when she had only those left whom, rightly or wrongly, she did not value.

Her letters and those written to her give a picture of the full woman from youth to old age, of her joys and sorrows, of her moments of peace and her times of strife and conflict. Through their pages walks a woman who came to grips with life during the troublesome, lawless days of Henry VI and the Wars of the Roses, five centuries ago.

FOOTNOTES

Footnotes to Chapter I

¹Davis, Paston Letters, Clarendon ed., xxvi, quoting Sir John Fenn from the Preface to the first edition, Original Letters Etc. (1787), I. xv. xviii.

²Kingsford, Fifteenth Century England, 124-25.

³Bennett, The Pastons, i.

⁴Gairdner, The Paston Letters, cclvi.

⁵Whenever possible, I shall quote from Davis' new Oxford edition of Paston Letters and Papers. Since only Part I, containing letters from the immediate family, is available, letters from friends and employees of the family will be quoted from Davis' Clarendon edition and, failing that, from Gairdner's edition. Quotations will be identified in the text as: (Davis,), (Davis, Clarendon,), and (Gairdner,).

⁶Warrington, ed., Paston Letters. vii.

⁷Gairdner, xlv.

⁸Ibid., xlv.

⁹Wilkinson, Later Middle Ages, 235.

¹⁰Gairdner says on page cxxxiii of the Introduction to his edition of The Paston Letters, "He (Fastolf) seems to have been related in blood to John Paston's wife" and, in a note explains, "Note the passages in Margaret's letter (No. 183)" quoting the two passages I have quoted in my text. Yet the letter in question was written by Agnes Paston; it is headed, "Agnes Paston to John Paston", opens with the usual greeting of a parent to a son, "I grete you well", and ends with "By your moder, Anneys Paston". Bennett could not have checked the letter for he writes on page 9 of The Pastons and Their England, "Perhaps he (Fastolf) was distantly related to the Pastons, for Margaret once writes 'I suppose Sir John Fastolf if he were spoken to, would be gladder to let his kinsmen have part than strange men'," and he refers to Letter No. 183 in a note. He goes on to say that Fastolf often speaks of John Paston as "cousin", referring in a note to Letters Nos. 123, 132, etc., but adding that "This point cannot be pressed unduly, as "cousin" was frequently used between people who had no blood relationship."

Letter 123 refers to "my cousin Paston" and Letter 132 refers both to "my cosyn Paston" and to "my cosyn John à Berney", Margaret's uncle. Letter 132 and Letter 183 (Davis, 25) are cited by Davis as evidence that Margaret was related to Fastolf (page lv.). It seems to me that one must decide whether Fastolf's use of "cousin" in referring to John à Berney carries more weight than Agnes' words "Asay him in my name" (Davis, 25) in determining a blood relationship. If the relationship were through Margaret's family, I think that Agnes would have said, "Asay him in your wife's name".

¹¹Gairdner, cxxxvi-vii.

¹²Ibid., clxxv.

Footnotes to Chapter II

¹Davis, 'Text of Margaret Paston's letters', 18 and 24.

²Kingsford, Prejudice, 25.

³Ibid., 22.

⁴Kingsford, Historical Literature, 196.

⁵Kingsford, Prejudice, 23.

⁶Kingsford, Historical Literature, 195.

⁷Ford, ed., Age of Chaucer, 87.

⁸Kingsford, Prejudice, 25.

⁹Ibid., 24.

¹⁰Ibid., 24.

¹¹Ford, ed., Chaucer, 88.

¹²Bennett, The Pastons, 102.

¹³Kingsford, Prejudice, 38-39.

¹⁴Kingsford, Historical Literature, 196.

¹⁵Kingsford, Prejudice, 39.

¹⁶Bennett, The Pastons, 103.

¹⁷Ibid., 261.

¹⁸Ford, ed., Chaucer, 98.

¹⁹Bennett, The Pastons, 110-11.

²⁰In 1954, Davis believed that the word "schewe" indicated that Margaret could read. ('The Language of the Pastons', 121.), but he now feels that "schewe" could mean "make known" (Davis, Paston Letters, Oxford ed., xxxviii.).

²¹Davis, 'Language', 121.

²²Kingsford, ed., Stonor Letters, xlvi.

²³Gairdner, ccclxiii.

²⁴Although both Gairdner and Wyles believed that Margaret wrote at least some of her letters, Norman Davis feels that there is no evidence that she could write at all. (Paston Letters, Oxford ed., xxxvii-viii.).

²⁵Kingsford, Prejudice, 31.

²⁶Power, Mediaeval People, 128.

²⁷The Stonor Letters and Papers will be referred to as (S.L.,).

²⁸The Cely Papers will be referred to as (C.P.,).

²⁹Wyld, Short History, 146.

³⁰Davis, 'Litera Troili', 238-41. The seven conventional phrases are found in Elizabeth Poynings letter to her mother, Agnes (Davis, 121).

³¹Davis, 'Letters of William Paston', 38.

³²Davis, 'Scribal Problem', 39.

³³Davis, 'Language', 125-29.

³⁴Davis, 'Letters of William Paston', 38.

³⁵Tolkien and Gordon, Sir Gawain, 137.

³⁶Davis, 'Language', 124.

³⁷Ibid., 130.

³⁸Wyld, Colloquial English, 327.

³⁹Wyld, Short History, 235.

⁴⁰Davis, 'Language', 123.

⁴¹Ibid., 126.

⁴²Ibid., 131.

⁴³Wyld, Short History, 228.

⁴⁴Matthews, ed., Later Medieval English Prose, 74-84.

⁴⁵Tolkien and Gordon, Sir Gawain, xxvi.

⁴⁶Ibid., 145.

⁴⁷Ibid., 145.

⁴⁸Ibid., 145. Norman Davis agrees that the use of ye must have been customary in good society between husband and wife ('Litera Troili', note 5, page 243).

⁴⁹Davis, 'Language', 126.

⁵⁰Davis, 'A Paston Hand', 129.

⁵¹Davis, 'Letters of William Paston', 39-40.

⁵²Davis, 'Language', 123-24.

⁵³Ibid., 126.

⁵⁴Ibid., 126-29.

⁵⁵Wyld, Short History, 211.

⁵⁶Davis, 'Language', 125.

⁵⁷Brunner, *Middle English*, 88.

⁵⁸Davis, 'Language', 119, quoted from the prologue to Caxton's translation of the Eneydos.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 132-33.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 133.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 134.

⁶²Davis, Paston Letters, *World's Classics ed.*, note 4, p. 54.

⁶³Davis, 'Language', 134.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 136.

⁶⁵Davis, Paston Letters, *World's Classics ed.*, note 3, page 177.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, notes 1 and 2, page 178.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, note 1, page 173.

Footnotes to Chapter III

¹Hunt, Fifteenth Century England, 7.

²Bennett, The Pastons, 242.

³Hunt, 4.

⁴Bennett, The Pastons, 215.

Footnotes to Chapter IV

¹Dobson, English Pronunciation, II, 956.

²Wyld, Colloquial English, 80.

³Ibid., 80.

Footnotes to Chapter V

¹Letters from The Plumptre Correspondence will be referred to as (P.C.,).

²Letters from The Stonor Letters and Papers will be referred to as (S.L.,).

³Letters from The Cely Papers will be referred to as (C.P.,).

⁴Stonor Letters and Papers, xliii.

⁵H.E. Bennett states that the Celys "were often obliged to rely on the business powers of their wives" (p. 62, The Pastons and Their England). Letters nos. 38 and 39 written by John Cely to George Cely are the only letters in The Cely Papers which refer to a business transaction made by a woman. There is no evidence that "my sistur yowre aunte" was married or that she was doing business on anyone's behalf but her own, nor is there any evidence in The Cely Papers on which Bennett could base his statement.

⁶The Stonor Letters and Papers, xxix

⁷Davis, The Paston Letters, Oxford ed., lxxvi.

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B29998